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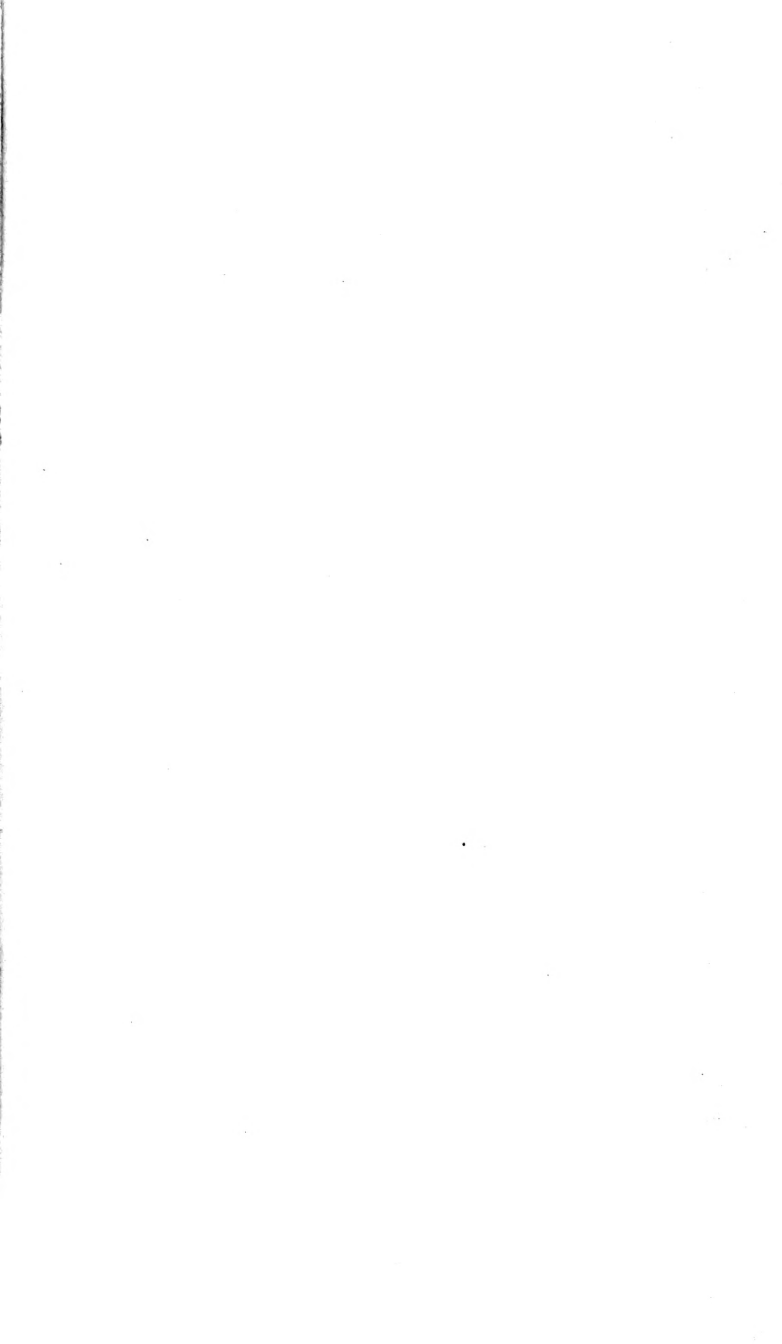
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THE  
ANCIENT RÉGIME.

VOL. II.

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THE  
ANCIENT RÉGIME:

A TALE.

BY  
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"THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER," "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE  
OLD SCHOOL," ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

WITH her eyes bent down towards her saddle-bow, and her cheek still somewhat glowing, Annette departed, proceeding at a quick pace up the hill upon the slope of which the château of Castel Nogent was built. When she had passed the acclivity, however, she tightened the rein and suffered the horse to go on at a walk, thinking deeply over all that had occurred. Again and again she asked her heart, "What are these sensations that I feel towards Ernest de Nogent? Is this love?"

She could no longer conceal from herself that

he was not to her the same as other men ; but she would not believe — or perhaps I should say she would not admit, that it could be love which she felt. The time was so short, — their meetings so few, that she could not — she would not, allow that it could be love. But yet Annette was not only now convinced that she did feel different sensations towards the young Lord of Castel Nogent from those which she had ever experienced before towards any human being ; but, upon reflection, she found that her whole conduct had been such as to give him hope and encouragement ; and she blushed as if a thousand eyes had been upon her at the presence of that conviction in her heart.

We have shown that Annette de St. Morin had been tempted, a night or two before, to shut her eyes to the consideration of her *own feelings*, and to shrink from the examination of the new passion which was insidiously taking possession of her heart : but, though she might do this, Annette had been taught from her earliest days, never so to shrink from the examination of her own conduct, never so



to shut her eyes to the result of any action that she had actually done; and she now carefully and thoughtfully enquired to what she had plighted and pledged herself by her demeanour towards Ernest de Nogent. It might, indeed, be a question, whether she examined fairly; because Inclination, in all our dealings with our own heart, is at the ear of the judge; and perhaps Annette did give a little more weight to every word she had spoken, to every look and gesture favourable to Ernest, than she would have done, had he been less agreeable to her. The general result, however, was right; it was, that she had given him a degree of encouragement which she never could retract with honour, and, as a consequence of that very encouragement, she felt herself bound to tell all that had passed, even including the thoughts and feelings of her own mind and heart, to the person who had been to her, as she herself said, more than a father.

The anticipation of doing so, however, agitated and troubled her far more than she could have believed any thing of the kind would do.

How to begin the tale she knew not; how to go on with it was equally perplexing; how to express what were her feelings, what were her thoughts, made the colour rise in her cheek, and her eyes sink to the ground even while she asked herself the question.

Her horse went now merely at a walk, but she urged him not on either by voice or whip; and, so far from hastening homeward, she took a somewhat longer path through the woods, not remarking that clouds had gathered in the sky while she had remained at Castel Nogent, and that the sultry heat of the air portended the coming of a storm. So it was, however. Over the tops of the tall trees might be seen gathering dull leaden masses of dense vapour, and the breath of the air had not the balminess of the preceding days, but was both sultry and oppressive in the highest degree. It could not be called fiery, like the gale that blows over the sands of Egypt; but it felt moist, though hot and difficult to breathe, as if it were borne from the depths of fens and morasses, exhaling deadly vapours under the rays of

an ardent sun. Still, between the hard edges of the heavy clouds, the blue sky appeared, especially towards the zenith, where the great orb of day continued pouring on his flood of sovereign splendour, as if at once careless and unconscious of all the storms and tempests which might vex the earth below. The hum of the insect world, which had been busy in the morning, was now still; the voice of the birds, which had resounded through the woods and the valleys, was now reduced to a few short notes, begun perhaps in gladness of heart, but terminated apparently in apprehension of some coming evil.

To all these warnings, however, Annette was blind, so busy was she in the world of her own heart; and the only external thing that caught her attention was the fretfulness of her horse. Attributing it to thirst from heat and exercise, she guided the animal to the bank of the stream; and casting down the rein upon his neck, she let him drink, gazing with apparent interest upon the reflection of her beautiful jennet's head in the water, but, in truth, see-

ing nothing but the images within her own breast. She was thus sitting calmly, with her hands resting on her knee, her head bent down, and her eyes fixed upon the clear smooth stream, when suddenly a flash of intense brightness blazed over the glistening expanse of water, followed instantly by a loud clap of thunder which made the woods echo around. The horse threw its head suddenly back from the river, reared, plunged, and darted forward ; and before Annette could make any effort to save herself, she was cast headlong into the stream.

The water was not very deep, and the servants flew in an instant to the assistance of one whom the whole household loved ; but still, when they drew her forth from the stream, she was to all appearance lifeless. With the tears and loud lamentations in which the excitable people of the south of France indulge on all occasions of grief, the servants bore the form of Annette on towards the château ; but, when they arrived there, they found nothing but faces of bustle and anxiety. Horses and postillions were standing in the courtyard : good old Donnine was giving mani-

fold orders regarding various packages of ladies' gear which other servants were bringing down; and the great family coach, as well as the old *chaise de poste*, were drawn out into the principal courtyard. All betokened preparations for an immediate journey; but all this bustle was turned instantly into silent consternation as poor Annette was carried into the château. They bore her forward into a large saloon on the ground floor; but, as they stretched her on one of the long hard sofas of that day, some signs of returning animation began to show themselves. Her beautiful hands closed with a convulsive motion as if she felt pain, and it became clear that life was not extinct.

The sounds of lamentation and dismay which had followed Mademoiselle de St. Morin into the house soon reached the ears of the Count de Castelneau; and, after a vain enquiry, he came down himself, followed by his two medical attendants, who happened at the moment to be with him.

To behold her he loved best on earth lying there, pale as a withered flower, her beautiful

dark hair fallen about her face and neck, her eyes closed, her lips bloodless, might well affect any man deeply, and doubtless it greatly moved the Count de Castelneau ; but it was not such sights, or such events, that produced those attacks of illness under which he had lately suffered. His lip quivered a little, the gaze of his eye grew more intense and anxious, and the muscles of the brow contracted in a certain degree ; but he had every command over himself, and asked in a clear calm voice, “ How did this happen ? ”

The tale was soon told ; but even as it was telling the surgeon, who was luckily present, exclaimed, “ She is not dead ; ” and, drawing forth his lancet, he proceeded to employ such means as he thought necessary to recall poor Annette to consciousness. At first the blood flowed with difficulty, but soon it came in a fuller stream, and in a few moments she opened her eyes faintly, and then closed them again, murmuring an indistinct word or two with her lips. It were tedious to tell all that was done to restore her to recollection ; but let it suffice that,

in the space of about three quarters of an hour, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, who was suffering, not from the temporary suspension of animation produced by immersion in the water, but from the stunning effects of her fall, completely recovered her speech and consciousness; and, holding out her hand to Monsieur de Castelleau, she said, “Do not fear!—Do not fear, my dear father! I am not much hurt—I am better now.”

A glistening drop came into the count's eyes; but he replied tranquilly, “Thank God! my Annette, you are not much hurt. These gentlemen assure me that such is the case; but be composed for a little while, and do not speak yourself, for I have some news to give you. I will leave you for a few minutes, and return to tell you more.”

The count was gone about half an hour, and, when he did come back, he found Annette apparently much recovered, though she was in truth severely bruised, and in considerable pain.

“What are the tidings, my dear father?”

she asked, as he sat down again beside her.

“They are no evil tidings, I hope?”

“No ! oh, no !” replied the count ; “do not alarm yourself, my Annette ; but I fear I cannot remain to witness your recovery, dear child. The king has sent me an order to come to Paris without an instant’s delay. The cause assigned for this command is much suspicion of disaffection, in consequence of my long absence from the capital. If this be the real cause, such suspicions may be cleared away in an hour.”

As he spoke the count fell into deep thought, and remained with his eyes fixed upon the ground for several moments ; while Annette gazed up in his face with an eager and enquiring look, as if seeking to scan her guardian’s feelings, and gather more information than his words afforded. No one, perhaps, was so well qualified to learn from the countenance of Monsieur de Castelneau what was passing in his heart as Annette de St. Morin ; but even to her his face was a very unreadable book on most occasions. In the present instance, however, she was right in some degree ;



and she said, "You doubt whether that suspicion be the real cause or not? but you must not go without me. I can go very well — I am recovered now — I can go quite well."

The count bent down his head and kissed her brow, saying, "I am afraid, my dear Annette, that I am very selfish with regard to you, and that my love for your society has but too often prevented me from giving you the advantage of mingling in the world as much as you ought to do; but yet, my dear child, I am not so basely selfish as to rob you of health, perhaps of life, for any comfort or consolation whatsoever. It is quite impossible that you should go with me in your present state; equally impossible, I grieve to say, that I should stay till you are better. These gentlemen of art, however, inform me that, if you remain tranquil here, I need be under no apprehension for your health. One of them I must take with me, as it might be dangerous for me to travel without assistance. Monsieur Merle, however, will see you every day; and you must let me know by letter what is the exact state of

my dear child's health. I, in return, will write to you as soon as I reach Paris, and you shall speedily hear both how I am, and what is the real cause of this sudden call. It is strange that, after eighteen years' absence, I should have any enemy so pertinacious as to inspire suspicions of my conduct in the mind of the king !”

“You do not think,” said Annette, in a low voice, and with a glance towards the other persons who were in the room, which made the count bend down his ear to listen, — “you do not think that the Baron de Cajare can have any thing to do with this ?”

The count started, exclaiming, “What makes you think so ?”

The colour came slightly into Annette's cheek, as she replied, “I have scarcely any reason ; but I recollect he one day said, when he was speaking in a way which surprised and pained me, that means might be easily found of forcing you out of this old château to what he called the intellectual pleasures of the capital.”

The slight cloud which hung upon the count's

brow cleared away in a moment. "Ha! Monsieur de Cajare!" he said, "is it so? You are doubtless right, my Annette. I have known men sent to the Bastile at the instigation of intriguing scoundrels, for a much less object than that which Monsieur de Cajare has in view. He shall find himself mistaken, however."

"He has done so already," replied Annette, "for he was down at Castel Nogent this morning, and seemed to think he had every thing and every body in his power; but, in the midst of it all, an agent of police came in, arrested him, and sent him to the Bastile."

"Indeed!" said the count, "indeed! But what more, my Annette; you seem to have more to say?"

"I must forbid it to be said now; I am afraid," said the physician, advancing to Annette's side; "it is neither fit for you, count, nor for Mademoiselle de St. Morin. Remember, my dear sir, you have still some business of rather an agitating nature to go through."

"Agitating!" said the count; "you do not suppose that talking of, or making arrange-

ments for, the only one event that is certain in human life, I mean death, can have any thing agitating in it to me? My dear Annette," he went on, "about to take a long journey, and having scarcely recovered from a severe fit of illness, I have thought it right once more to make my will in form. I have also laid out a large portion of your fortune in the purchase of the small lordship of St. Aubin on the Lot. You will take my word for it, my dear child, that it was an advantageous purchase; the deeds, properly made out in your name, are in the hands of my notary up stairs, but you must sign a paper signifying your consent to my thus employing your money on your behalf. As this good man," he added, pointing to Monsieur Merle, "shakes his head at this conversation, I will again leave you for a while, and then come back to you for a moment before I depart."

Monsieur de Castelneau was absent for a greater length of time than before, and he then returned with his own notary and another member of the law. They carried with them

various deeds and papers, which they presented to Annette and explained to her as the titles to the estate of St. Aubin, which her guardian was said to have purchased with money belonging to her.

The sum did indeed so far belong to her — although it proceeded from a moiety of his own revenues, which he had laid by ever since he had succeeded to the title of the Count de Castelneau — that he had always called it to himself Annette's portion; and he had thus suffered it to accumulate, in remembrance of the promise he had made, to give her a dowry according to the rank in which he brought her up. The laws of France, however, have always intermeddled with the disposal of private property, in a manner ever vexatious and often most inconvenient; and, in order to avoid all the difficulties which might thus have occurred, the Count of Castelneau had been obliged to have recourse to this method of purchasing property for Annette, which she could not be deprived of, let what might become of any other sum which he left to her by his will.

The formal part of the business was soon over; the notaries took the deeds away with them, but gave her an acknowledgment that they held them for her use; and in a minute after one of the servants came to inform the count that mademoiselle's clothes had been removed from the carriage, and that all was ready for his own departure.

“I must now bid you farewell, my Annette,” replied the count; “but since I have heard what you had to tell me regarding Monsieur de Cajare, I go with a mind at ease. Previously to your return, my poor girl, I had fondly hoped that you would be the companion of my journey, and good Donnine had bustled herself for your departure. That would have been exactly what Monsieur de Cajare desired, no doubt; but this accident disappoints him as well as me, and I now leave you mistress of Castelneau till my return. I have but one injunction to give you, my Annette, which is, to be careful of yourself. You will be kind to all others, I know; but I shall be very, very anxious regarding you, for these two sad

dangers that have befallen you have shaken my confidence in your safety. Be careful, therefore, my Annette, and let me hear from you as soon as it is possible."

Thus saying he left her, and a few unwonted tears rose in the fair girl's eyes; for, though her nature was not an apprehensive one, and experience had not yet taught her the instability of every earthly thing, yet she could not part from the friend and guardian of her infancy and youth, without a feeling of loneliness, ay, and of fear, not lest any evil should fall upon herself, but lest the fatigues of the way, or the intrigues of evil men at court, might impair his health and affect his happiness or life.

## CHAP. II.

THOUGH it may soon be our duty to follow the course of some of our other characters, to enquire into the proceedings of Monsieur de Cajare, to accompany Ernest de Nogent on his journey, or to trace the adventures of Monsieur de Castelneau, we must for the present dwell with Annette in the old château, and speak of some events which took place within a very short time after the departure of the count himself. As we have said, poor Annette felt sad and lonely; and, though good Donnine did her best to soothe and to console her, and though the well-regulated mind of the young lady herself taught her that to give way to apprehension was neither wise nor right, and that it was a duty to amuse her mind by every means in her power, yet the next two or three hours were very heavy to her, and she experienced, though



but in a slight degree, that desolation of heart which every one must have felt still more deeply who has lost a dear and valued friend for ever. As the evening came on, also, the effects of her fall were more sensibly felt; she became somewhat feverish towards night, and the physician, who returned to see her, gave her some drugs to allay the pain and tranquillize her nerves, and directed her immediately to retire to rest.

Although it was not yet dark, she did as he directed, and left the saloon vacant. The evening sun streamed into it cheerfully, and traced a natural dial on the floor, marking the hours till the ray faded. The light grew more and more dim in the chamber; the black oak carving of the ceilings were lost in the obscurity; and the moon began to show herself in the heavens, triumphing, yet but timidly, in the absence of her great and glorious rival of the day.

It was at that hour and moment that the door of the saloon opened quietly, and a lady entered, leaning on the arm of a gentleman in dark clothing. No servant preceded them, no

attendant followed ; and the lady, sinking into one of the large arm-chairs, covered her eyes with her hands, murmuring, “ Am I here once more ? ”

For several minutes she remained evidently weeping, but in silence and without violence : they seemed the tears of memory, and flowed by in the same solemn silence with which all the objects of the past march in review before the eye of conscience. The gentleman did not seat himself, but stood by her side uncovered ; and, after a few minutes, he walked forward to the window, and gazed out towards the west, where a faint greenish film of light, the last effort of day, still hung like a curtain before the stars.

“ I fear, madam,” he said, at length, returning to the lady’s side, — “ I fear, madam, that, if we do not proceed quickly, we shall lose the little light that remains, and be obliged to call some of the men to bring a lamp, which may be unpleasant.”

“ I am ready, my good friend ; I am ready,” she replied : “ but you may well imagine what

are the feelings with which I behold all these well-remembered scenes, where the bubble of happiness first rose upon the stream of my life, and then burst and passed away for ever. But come ! I could guide you in the dark ; for, if the burning of the heart could communicate its intense fires to the earthly frame, every one of my footsteps, when last I trod the way from that chamber to this, must have been printed indelibly on the floor. Come, come, we shall soon find the place where my heart was broken."

Thus saying, she led the way across the room to a smaller door than that by which she had entered, and on the opposite side. Taking her way through it, she proceeded by a corridor to the end of that wing of the château, and then passed the door of Annette's bed-chamber to the extreme west, where one of the large towers contained within itself two or three of the best rooms in the castle. The door which there ended the corridor was locked ; but the gentleman who was with her had a number of keys in his hand, and, with extraordinary ease and pre-

cision, he selected the one which the keyhole required, applied it, and gave her entrance.

Those were days in which window-shutters to the higher rooms of a country house were almost unknown, and consequently in the apartments they now entered, which looked full towards the spot where the sun had set not half an hour before, the light was much more strong than at the opposite side of the building. Even here it was very faint, but there was still enough to guide the lady across the ante-chamber to the door of the room beyond. She laid her hand upon the lock, but paused for a moment as if under the influence of some strong emotion; and then, conquering her irresolution, she threw open the door, disclosing a bed-room fitted up with great taste and luxury: a toilet table festooned with velvet and gold; a bed with hangings of the same rich materials; tall mirrors in beautiful frames; and in the centre panel of the wainscot, on the opposite side of the room, a full-length portrait of a gentleman in a military dress, apparently about to mount his horse. One foot was in the stirrup, one

hand was upon the mane ; and while the countenance was turned so as to look full into the room, the other hand, by the painter's skill, appeared to stretch forth from the canvass, and wave a hat and plume as if bidding adieu to the spectators.

There was an air of joy, and youth, and bright hilarity in the whole figure and countenance, which not even the dim twilight of that hour could altogether conceal, and upon it fixed the lady's eyes the moment she opened the door. She pressed her hand upon her heart ; looked around the room with an expression almost of fear ; and then, advancing with a quick step, she gazed earnestly upon the portrait, till, sinking on her knees before it, she murmured a short prayer. She remained there scarcely for a minute ; but ere she rose many a tear bedewed the spot where she knelt, and it was with difficulty she could restrain them from flowing for some time afterwards.

Advancing into a small dressing-room beyond, and approaching the huge mantelpiece of black oak, she said, laying her hand upon a large

carved moulding, "It is here;" and she ran her hand along it more than once, seeming to press upon the various flowers and figures with which it was ornamented. As she did so, she began to tremble, saying, "Some one must have opened it since, or else they must have discovered and closed it altogether. It used to open with a touch."

"Let me try," said the gentleman, who was with her; "it may well have got rusty in twenty years."

"That rose!" said the lady,—"that rose! I am sure it was that or the one next to it."

Her companion advanced and pressed upon the spot in the cornice which she pointed out. It instantly gave way under his stronger hand; the moulding fell forward like the front of some ancient *scrutoire*, and at the same moment a parchment rolled out and dropped at the lady's feet. She instantly picked it up and pressed it to her heart, and then, turning to the names that were signed at the end, endeavoured to read them, but in vain.

"It matters not," she said, "it matters not!"

This is the contract. There is nothing else there,—let us begone.”

“It is better to be quite sure,” replied her companion; and, putting his hand into the cavity from which the parchment had fallen, he speedily produced another, though very much smaller in size.

“Here is another deed,” he said; “most likely the procuration of some relation.”

“True,” she answered; “true, I had forgot that; but it is not of as much consequence as the other. Now let us go.”

“You had better do so, madam,” replied her companion; “for the carriage will carry you to Figeac speedily. I must remain, however, and see that these men do their duty—though the search is all nonsense, and they will find nothing.”

“I suppose so,” answered the lady; “but how happens it, I wonder, that such suspicion should arise without a cause?”

“Some enemy!” replied the gentleman. “Unhappily a minister’s ears are always open to every accusation. To be accused is often as

bad as to be criminal ; and the Count de Castelneau may well think himself lucky to have nothing worse to undergo than a mere journey to Paris, if, as I believe, some powerful enemy has accused him."

" That enemy has been my best friend," replied the lady ; " but I will hasten away now, and wait for you at Figeac."

Thus saying, she retired from the dressing-room, and again paused before the picture in the other chamber ; but, as time acts upon the memories of objects past, the evening light had acted upon that portrait. When she had before seen it, the form, the features, the dress, were all distinct, though the colouring was somewhat grey and cold ; now all was confused and obscure, — there was neither hue nor exact form left, and the vague figure of a man mounting his horse was traced more by the aid of recollection than the eye.

The lady passed on ; and the gentleman who was with her, taking care to close every door behind them, and to remove all trace of their visit, followed her quickly, and accompanied her



through the same corridors and rooms which they had passed before, down the great staircase into the courtyard. A number of men were drawn up there in deep silence, at a short distance from a carriage to which were attached four horses; and at some distance beyond appeared a number of the servants of the Count de Castelneau. The latter, however, seemed either stupefied or overawed; for they remained motionless and unconcerned while the stranger handed the lady into the vehicle. As he was about to retire from the door of the carriage, she bent forward and said, "I am sure you would suffer me to see her if it were possible."

"It is wholly impossible, madam," he answered, "without ruin to all;" and, bowing low, he retired into the château.

During the greater part of that night lights were seen in the various parts of the building, and the servants of the Count de Castelneau remained watching with some anxiety proceedings which caused them great apprehension, but which they could not prevent. Strange to say, however, the whole passed with so much quiet-

ness and silence, that neither Annette, nor her maid who slept in a neighbouring chamber, nor old Donnine, who, ever since the young lady had been a child, claimed a room as close to that of Mademoiselle de St. Morin as possible, was ever awakened.

Early on the following day, when Donnine, who retained all the matutinal habits of her youth, rose and proceeded to resume the cares of the household which she superintended, the whole bevy of maidens under her sage charge and governance assailed her at once with accounts of the domiciliary visit which had been paid to the château by a large body of police. They had gone through all the count's apartments, she was told ; had examined his papers, and opened all his cabinets and drawers,—at least so the servants inferred ; for, be it remarked, they were themselves excluded from the chambers where the police were pursuing their avocations, except when some information or assistance was necessary. They, moreover, told Donnine that the gentleman who commanded the police had taken particular pains

not to make any noise or disturbance, and had said that there was no use of searching Mademoiselle de St. Morin's apartments, or waking her from her sleep. On receiving this information, Donnine consulted with herself whether she should or should not inform her young lady of what had occurred, and she determined not to do so till Annette had risen and breakfasted.

All her wise precautions were, however, in vain; for Annette's maid, who, amongst other good qualities, possessed the peculiar faculty of the parrot and the magpie, repeating like them every thing that she heard, caught some ten words of the intelligence as she leaned over the stairs, and, running instantly into Annette's room, woke her with the tidings that the house had been visited by the police, who had carried off every paper they could find. With the common babble, in short, of persons in her situation, she told all that she knew, and a great deal more; and the consequence was, that Annette, who was still suffering considerably from the effects of her fall, and who would certainly not have risen that day had it not been for

some extraordinary cause, began to dress herself immediately, and was on the eve of going down, when Donnine appeared to enquire how she had passed the night.

Without delay, Annette proceeded through the chambers which had been visited during the night, and found that the papers had not been carried away, though they had been examined. One scrutoire and one desk she found closed by a double seal connected by a thick piece of parchment ; and after considering for some moments what this appearance might indicate, and what should be her own conduct, she thought that the best plan of proceeding would be to write immediately to the Baron de Nogent, asking advice from his better experience. She accordingly did so, and at the same time despatched a letter by a special courier to the Count de Castelneau, hoping that information of what had taken place might reach him before he quitted Limoges.

## CHAP. III.

THE Count de Castelneau leaned back in his carriage and thought of Annette, while the slow wheels, at the rate of about five miles an hour, rolled him onward towards Paris. Perhaps never had he known the tediousness of life before, for the thoughts of an active and busy mind had always furnished sufficient employment for each leisure moment; but now he had wherewithal to measure the minutes, though not to occupy them, and each mile that he was borne away from the society which he loved best seemed but to increase the slowness of time's tardy flight. There was nothing on the road to amuse or interest him: he had seen every tree and every stone, in the course of the first twenty miles, a hundred times before; and the physician, who sat beside him in the carriage, after having made a vain attempt to converse

upon indifferent topics, had sunk back into the corner, where he now lay pillowed on the soft bosom of sleep.

The count then communed with himself, and the chief subject of thought was Annette de St. Morin. He asked himself what were his real feelings, what his own most secret wishes and purposes. He was a great doubter of his own heart. He knew it—that sad, frail, wily thing, the human heart—he knew it by experience to be the most deceitful of all things; and, alas, still worse! more deceitful to those who trust it than to any others. He asked himself whether, were Annette herself willing to give him her hand, he would really seek to wed her. He answered, “No!” boldly, almost indignantly. Such a purpose, such a wish, he thought, had never entered his mind. Not to lose her society was all that he desired. But the next question was, how her constant companionship was to be preserved without wedding her? Could he keep her who was so formed for domestic happiness lingering out her days almost in solitude? could he conde-

scend to watch her lest her heart should choose for itself, to exclude all who might please, attract, or win her? Would it be wise? would it be just? Oh, no! his own heart forbade the thought at once; but then, with what art it suggested again that the only means of gaining both objects, of retaining Annette for ever near him, and yet suffering her to know all the blessings of domestic life, and all the high pleasures of well-chosen society, was to make her his own by the bond of marriage. She had never yet, he thought, seen any one to love but himself. All her first affections were his: those affections were evidently like the love of a daughter to a father, it was true; but might they not easily be changed into warmer and tenderer feelings? As he reflected upon it, however, he shrunk from the idea; he thought almost with horror of losing the fond name of father which she gave him, even to assume that of husband; and he covered his eyes with his hand, and turned away his mind from the subject.

“I will think of it no more,” he said; but,

alas ! to have thought of it all was a step gained by the adversary, from which he was only to be driven by pain and sorrow. The count kept his resolution for the time, however ; turned his mind to other things, asking himself a thousand questions regarding his sudden call to Paris ; and busied his imagination in enquiring, who had really laid the charge against him, and what that charge actually was. There was a vague apprehension presented itself from time to time, a spectre rising from the shadowy night of the past, and flitting before his eyes, faint and indistinct yet dark and horrible ; but he would not, he dared not, suffer that spectre to come near. He drove it away with a scoff, while it was yet afar, though, had he suffered it to approach close to his eyes, it would have overpowered him altogether. He concluded, with Annette — he chose to conclude that his accuser must be the Baron de Cajare, that the object was to bring his fair ward to Paris, and the charge some of those idle accusations which the French government in that day was always very willing to employ, in



order to force the provincial nobles into the capital.

At length the carriage stopped in order that the horses might be changed at a little inn and post-house between Cahors and Limoges, which he had known well in former years, and where, as it was a pleasant spot in a beautiful country, he had spent sometimes weeks together. The hostess had been a very gay and pretty woman, a year or two younger than himself; and with her, in his early days of levity, he had often indulged in many an idle and over-familiar jest. It was now night; the country round he could not see; but there came to the side of the carriage an old woman, bearing the light, and courtesying low to the strange gentleman, as she announced herself as the post-mistress.

The count gazed at her attentively; she was the same gay personage he had formerly known; but, oh, how changed! She had sunk, in those twenty or two and twenty years, into a coarse and withered old dame. The freshness of the cheek, the neat waist, the smart foot and ankle,

were all gone. Much exposure and work, as well as some care and anxiety, had left her brown and shrivelled, and not a trace of beauty or of youth remained.

Monsieur de Castelneau gazed and felt how time had passed; and, as the idea he had entertained of wedding Annette came up for an instant before his mind, he applied the homily to his own heart, and a sneering smile came upon his lip at the thought of his own weakness.

It rarely happens, when we are tempted to evil thoughts or evil deeds, that some warning is not whispered in our ear, that some obstacle is not thrown in our way. It is only, in short, when our heart takes part with the temptation that we fall,—and then, fall without palliation. The count, however, was eager to prevent his mind from yielding to what he felt was wrong, and he made the best use of the little incident which had occurred. He looked out at the post-mistress; she did not know him in the least. He spoke to her for a moment or two; she did not even recognise his voice.

“I am as much changed as she is,” he said to himself; “and when I can imagine that ardent youth in its first freshness can feel passion for age like this, then I may expect that Annette may love me, as a wife should love her husband. He cast the idea once more from him, as a thing vain and absurd, and made the postillions drive on as quickly as possible.

The journey of that day, however, was of course short, from the lateness of the hour at which the count had taken his departure; but the act of travelling seemed rather to have done him good than otherwise. He slept better than he had done for many nights previous, and woke early the following day prepared to pursue his way. His valet appeared to dress him as soon as he was up and had performed his devotions; and, as the man bustled about the room, first bringing one article to his master, and then another, he seemed struck with something which appeared upon the table, and handed the count a note, asking him if he had seen it.

Monsieur de Castelneau took it from his

hand ; looked at the seal ; then with a contracted brow and somewhat wild expression of countenance gazed in the man's face ; and then, as if with a great effort, tore open the note.

It contained but three words, "Go in peace!" but these words seemed to take a load off the count's mind, and he asked eagerly who had placed the note upon his table. All his own servants, and all the servants of the inn, denied, with every appearance of honesty, that they had done any thing of the kind, and the count was obliged to proceed on his way without any farther information concerning the event.

At Limoges, Monsieur de Castelneau received Annette's letter, informing him of the visit of the police, and the search for papers which had been made at the château. These tidings, though they led him to suppose that the charge was somewhat serious, only made him smile, as he well knew that nothing could be found at Castelneau which could show him to be implicated in any designs against the government. He answered Annette's letter before he set out, telling her how confident he was in

his own innocence, and giving her the still better intelligence of his hourly improving health and of the great benefit which the act of travelling seemed to produce. He then hastened on to Paris; and we shall not pause on any farther incidents of his journey, which passed quietly by, with only such little accidents and inconveniences as befell all travellers in those days.

The count alighted at one of those large furnished hotels which were then common in Paris, but which have very generally given way to more convenient places of abode for the lonely traveller. It was about three o'clock in the day when he arrived; but the aspect of the great city, after having for so many years enjoyed the calm and quiet scenes of the country, lay heavy and gloomy upon his heart. There were none of the sights or sounds which refresh the eye or the ear; there was nothing to divert any sense from the consciousness of being in the midst of a wide and heartless multitude, without one feeling in common with any of the human

beings who surrounded him. The count was somewhat fatigued also, and he therefore determined to pass the rest of that day in repose, and to wait until the next ere he visited the Duke de Choiseul, who had signed the letter, commanding him to appear in Paris.

It proved unfortunate that he did so; for, on sending the next day to enquire at what hour the duke would receive him, he found that the minister had quitted Paris the preceding night for his country seat, called Chanteloup, in the beautiful valley of Arpajon, and was not expected to return for several days. Knowing that in the court of Louis the Fifteenth, as in all other despotic courts, prompt obedience at the first summons is always looked upon with much favour, the count now hesitated as to what course he should pursue, in order to show that he had lost not a moment's time in executing the king's commands.

Neither Versailles nor Arpajon was very far from Paris; but the count, from his old knowledge of monarchs and statesmen, judged that it would be best to show his obedience to the

minister even before the king, and he consequently ordered horses to be put to his carriage, and took the road to Chanteloup.

Perfectly at his ease in regard to any offence against the government, Monsieur de Castelneau gazed forth upon the country, and endeavoured to amuse his mind with the scenery between Paris and Arpajon. As every one must know who has travelled on the road to Etampes, there is nothing very striking to be seen by the way, except occasionally some beautiful châteaux and parks, and the hill of Montlhery, with its curious old tower. But just at the moment that the count was gazing forth from the window of the carriage, and raising his eyes towards that tower with the smile of one who recognises an old friend, a carriage, with a musketeer on either side, passed him at a rapid rate on the way towards Paris. In the inside of the carriage was a gentleman, whom Monsieur de Castelneau instantly recognised as the Baron de Cajare; but the two vehicles had rolled past each other before he could at all see who was the person that oc-

cupied another seat in the carriage with the baron.

A few minutes more brought the count to the château of Chanteloup; and, passing through the park, he was soon in the great court, whence he sent in a servant to demand audience of the minister. Every thing now passed with the utmost rapidity: the innumerable domestics who were seen hurrying about the château seemed endowed with superhuman agility; so quick were all their motions, so rapidly they came and disappeared. It was simply, however, that the character of their master, in this as in almost all cases, affected his dependants; and scarcely could the count alight from his carriage and enter the hall, ere the messenger who had gone to the duke returned, desiring him to follow. Passing through one or two rooms filled with most beautiful pictures — some of the Italian and French school, but more of the Flemish — the count was led to a large library, of which the servant threw open the door, announcing him in a loud tone.

On the other side of the room, seated at a



table, and writing with the utmost rapidity, was a gentleman of very diminutive stature, extremely ugly in face, and with that dark saturnine complexion which is more commonly met with in the French capital than any where else. Yet there was something in that countenance so full of fire and animation, thought and intelligence, that the expression was worth all the beauty which ever was given to man. As soon as the count entered, the duke laid down his pen, rose from his seat, crossed the room with infinite grace and dignity, and, taking his visitor by the hand, pointed to a chair near a window which looked out upon the park, saying, "In one moment I shall be at your service; my letter is nearly finished. Your goodness will excuse me, I am sure. From that window you will find a fine view. Fancy it but a picture by Poussin, and you will have occupation for five minutes, at least."

"It is from the hand of a greater master, my lord," replied the count, "whose pictures, to say the truth, I am fonder of contemplating than even those of Poussin himself."

“True, sir, true,” replied the duke, in his quick way; “I perfectly agree with you: but we value the handiwork of Poussin, perhaps because we pay for it, more than the works of nature, because they are freely given by the bounty of God. We are a sad obtuse race, Monsieur le Comte, and we need to be flogged into liking what is good: we value nothing that we are not charged any thing for; but, as I said, I will be at your service in a minute.”

He then seated himself once more at the table, while the count took the chair near the window, and gazed forth upon the valley of Arpajon. Its green freshness was cheering to his eye, and he certainly could not have found a more pleasant subject of contemplation than the soft calm valley, with the sweet little stream flowing in the midst.

While he sat there, it three or four times occurred that a secretary entered from a room at the side, and presented a paper to the duke in silence. Choiseul took it, glanced his eye rapidly over it, signed his name at the bottom, and gave it back again without a word. All

was rapid and energetic in his house as in his ministry, and not a moment was lost while business was going forward. At the end of about five minutes, or rather more, the letter was concluded, folded up, sealed, and the small silver bell which stood at his right hand rung. Its tongue was scarcely still, and its place upon the table resumed, when a servant appeared and approached with a bow. The duke gave the man the letter, saying, "A horse and courier to Versailles. Back by four o'clock!"

The servant again bowed and retired; and the duke, laying down the pen which he had continued to hold, rose from his seat, and, seeming to cast off the load of care, advanced towards the window where the count was seated, saying with a smile, "And now, Monsieur le Comte de Castelneau, to resume what we were talking about. That is a most beautiful scene, is it not?"

"I have seen more beautiful," replied the count, "and have just come from amongst them."

“That is the reason,” replied the Duke de Choiseul, “why you and I estimate this view differently. You come from the bright scenes of Quercy, green fields, old castles, fine ruins, broad rivers, manifold streams and fountains. I recollect it all very well. I come from amidst grey houses, dusty streets, dull bureaus, in Paris; and from gold fringes, satin curtains, and buhl tables at Versailles. Therefore this view strikes me as the sweetest thing the eye can look upon. But there is more in it still. You and I, had we the magic power of one of the necromancers whom good Monsieur Galland has told us of, and could bring hither whatever prospect we chose, would each pitch upon a very different view from the other, and yet we should both be right. This may seem very strange, but it is true.”

“I can easily conceive it is, my lord,” replied the count.

“In what way, in what way, may I ask?” said the Duke de Choiseul, with his peculiar grace of manner. “I would fain know if our reasonings on the subject are the same.”

“ I suppose, my lord,” replied the count, in his usual calm and thoughtful tone, — “ I suppose that you, continually busied in matters of the deepest importance, harassed with the cares and the wants of a whole nation, and contemplating daily matters in themselves vast, striking, and terrible, must naturally prefer, in a place where you seek temporary repose, all that is calm, quiet, and refreshing — softness without asperities, and variety without abruptness.”

“ Exactly, exactly !” replied the duke, his whole face lighting up with a smile; “ and you, on your part, living in calm and quiet retirement, would prefer what is more bold and striking to the eye ; something, in short, that excites the imagination through the sight, and stirs up within us a gentle sort of agitation, sufficient to give life and variety to thoughts that might otherwise wear and overload the mind.”

“ You have expressed my feelings on this subject, my lord,” replied the count, “ as if you could see into my breast.”

“ I do !” answered the Duke de Choiseul ;  
“ and therefore I say, Monsieur de Castelneau,  
that you may go back to Paris with the most  
perfect ease and tranquillity of mind. I want  
no further conversation with you, to show me  
that you have not been mingling in the danger-  
ous and exciting course of faction and sedition,  
otherwise you would love the calm scene as  
well as I do. You may return, then, at  
ease ——”

“ To Castelneau ?” said the count.

“ No, I must not exactly say that,” replied  
the Duke de Choiseul, “ till I have heard the  
king’s pleasure on the subject. But you may  
go back to Paris without any disquietude —  
unless, indeed, you will do the duchess and  
myself the honour of dining here to-day, when  
I can show you some other pictures, as you  
say, not by so great a master as that, but  
perhaps by the finest painters who have ever  
imitated the works of the Great Artificer of  
all.”

“ Nay, my lord,” replied the count with  
a smile : “ I am but a rude countryman, and

for many years have mingled little with society."

"I will not take a refusal," replied the duke. "I do not know that any one is expected, and therefore I will conduct you to the duchess, who will entertain you for half an hour while I conclude the business of the day: forgive me for preceding you, that I may show the way."

"There is one question, my lord," said Monsieur de Castelneau, as they went on, "which I would fain ask, if you will permit me."

"What is that, count? what is that?" said the duke. "I will answer freely if I can."

"It is simply, my lord," replied the count, "to whom am I indebted for the pleasant suspicions which it seems have been entertained of my conduct?"

"Nay, nay, nay! Monsieur de Castelneau," exclaimed the duke with a laugh, "we must be upon honour with our good *mouchards*. Why, if we gave them up on every piece of information that we receive, there would be nothing

but cudgeling one honest man or another of them in Paris, all day long."

"He was not a very honest man, my lord," replied the count, "who made this charge against me; and I strongly suspect that he was no *mouchard* either."

"Then you have your eye upon some one," said the duke immediately. "Whom do you suspect?"

"The Baron de Cajare," replied the count at once.

The Duke de Choiseul laughed. "How secrets betray themselves, Monsieur de Castelleau!" he said: "it is clear, then, you have some quarrel with the Baron de Cajare."

"Not in the least, my lord duke," replied the count. "When last we met we were upon friendly terms; but, though I have not betrayed the secret, I will tell it without hesitation. The Baron de Cajare somewhat covets the hand and fortune of a young lady under my care: he has not prospered much in his suit with her, and would fain have her and myself in Paris that he may pursue it further."



“ Ha! is that it?” said the Duke de Choiseul with a thoughtful smile. “ The Baron de Cajare is in the Bastile — at least I trust that he is there by this time, for he left me an hour ago to return thither. — But come, let us join the duchess, count. She shall show you her collection of miniatures.”

## CHAP. IV.

THE Duchess of Choiseul was a woman of very superior mind. She received the count de Castelneau with kindness and affability, but with a degree of reserve; for it seems that she had known something of him in former years, when he was the Abbé de Castelneau, and she Countess de Stainville, her husband not having at that time reached the eminent station which he now filled. Her first recollections, therefore, of Monsieur de Castelneau were not favourable; but a very few minutes' conversation with him removed the bad impression; and when she heard of years passed in solitude in the country, when she heard him talk of his abhorrence of Paris, of his desire to return to the calm shades of Castelneau, and marked the distaste he felt towards the gay and glittering society of the capital, she saw evidently that he was a man

upon whom time and thought had produced a beneficial effect, and whose heart had been ultimately amended, rather than depraved, by its commerce with the world. The hour which he spent with her alone was thus rendered not an unpleasant one. They spoke not of the past, but in all probability they both thought of it; and that thought, as the far retrospect of memory always does, mingled some melancholy, but of a sweet and gentle kind, with their other feelings; so that, when the duke returned, it needed several minutes of the society of the most cheerful man in France to enliven the conversation and turn it into a gayer course.

The duke, who could, when he so pleased, lay aside entirely the minister and statesman, and appear simply as the highly accomplished French gentleman, now threw off the reserve of his station with the Count de Castelneau, and led him through the apartments of his château, showing him all those fine pictures, gems, coins, and other objects of art, for which Chanteloup was at one time famous. He found his companion nothing inferior to himself in taste or

acquaintance with the arts, and much his superior in learning; and many an elaborate discussion took place upon the merits of this or that object, the minister conducting it with all his wit, fluency, and grace, Monsieur de Castelneau replying more shortly, but from a fund of knowledge and judgment which left little more to be said. There was a sufficient difference of opinion between the duke and his guest to make their communication varied and entertaining, yet a sufficient similarity to render it conversation rather than argument.

More than an hour was thus passed in that sort of conversation which was the greatest possible relief to the mind of Choiseul; and, on their return to the apartments of the duchess, they found her with a young gentleman in a military costume seated on a footstool at her feet, with his elbow leaning on the ground, and his eyes raised to the countenance of the lady. The moment the duke and his companion entered, the other gentleman rose, and the minister greeted him with a smile.

“ Ah, Ernest !” said the duke. “ What

brings you here, you wild youth? I hope this is not a new absence without leave."

"Oh no, my dear lord," replied the other. "I have full leave at this moment; for since I left my father on Saturday week, I have been at our head-quarters, received my reprimand, and obtained permission to come hither to excuse myself to the king."

"Was your reprimand severe?" asked the duke with a peculiar smile, well knowing that he had taken means to render it the contrary.

The young gentleman laughed. "Severe and cutting as the breath of the southerly wind," he said. "Oh, no, my lord, I owe you all thanks; but I am sure your own heart justifies you in having interceded for me."

"I should not have done it otherwise, Ernest, had you been my own son," replied Choiseul; "but though you had committed a fault which could not be passed over without some notice, yet the call to your father's sick bed — to his death bed, as you had reason to think it — was an excuse valid in mitigation, especially when you were not actually in cam-

paign, and when your presence was evidently not required with your regiment. It was not absolutely necessary that you should present yourself before the king ; but perhaps it is better, in order that this affair may not stop your promotion. Your father is nearly well, I find. I had a letter from him this morning.”

The young gentleman replied that he had also heard from his father ; and the duke, then turning to Monsieur de Castelneau, said : “ You must allow me, count, to introduce to you a young gentleman from your own part of the country—a nephew of Madame de Choiseul—Monsieur de Nogent. — Ernest, this is your neighbour, the Count de Castelneau.”

The young gentleman started with surprise ; but the count took his hand, expressing much pleasure in seeing him, and adding a commendation of the good old Baron de Nogent, short, indeed, and simple, but in such terms as brought a glistening light into the son’s eyes.

“ Your good opinion of him, Monsieur de Castelneau,” replied Ernest de Nogent, “ must be most gratifying to him, as I know he esteems

you highly. May I ask," he continued, "how was your fair ward when you left Castelneau, which must have been some days, I presume, after I quitted that part of the country myself?"

"I travelled but slowly," replied the count, "as I have been suffering much in health. Annette, I am happy to say, though not well enough to accompany me, was in no danger."

"Ill, ill!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, with a look that astonished not only the count, but Monsieur and Madame de Choiseul also, not a little — so eager, so anxious, so apprehensive was it. "The last time I saw her she seemed in perfect health."

"I did not know that you were acquainted with her," said the count, with an air of more surprise than pleasure.

"Oh, yes!" answered Monsieur de Nogent, "though my acquaintance with Mademoiselle de St. Morin is of a very recent date, it is quite sufficient to interest me deeply in her welfare. It began by my rendering her a slight service, when she was attacked by a wolf."

“ Oh, now I comprehend, now I comprehend !” exclaimed the count, taking his hand, and shaking it warmly. “ I owe you many thanks, Monsieur de Nogent, for saving the life of one most dear to me. I must write to Annette, and let her know who was her deliverer, for, at the time, she was ignorant of your name.”

“ I dared not give it,” replied Ernest de Nogent, “ for I was at that time absent from my regiment without leave, living in close concealment in my father’s house, and only venturing out through the woods to meet the person who conveyed my letters to and from Paris; for I had taken care to interest Monsieur de Choiseul in my cause, by representing to him that nothing but the state of my father’s health had induced me to commit what was, in truth, a breach of duty.”

“ You said your acquaintance with Annette commenced,” said the count, returning to the point which most interested his mind. “ Have you, then, seen her since?”

“ Oh, yes,” replied Ernest de Nogent: “ I



saw her at my father's house, on the very day I set off to rejoin the army. She then ascertained who I was, and I suppose some accidental circumstance must have prevented her from telling the facts to you."

The count paused, and meditated for a minute, but the cloud gradually left his brow. "Yes," he said thoughtfully, "yes, there were circumstances that prevented her from explaining the facts, and I am sorry to say those very circumstances are connected with her illness. You must, then, have left Castel Nogent on the same day that I quitted Castelneau; and on that very day, in returning from her visit to your father, her horse took fright at a flash of lightning, while she was suffering him to drink in the stream, and she was consequently thrown and considerably injured by the fall. I did not leave her, however, till the surgeons assured me there was no danger; and I have since heard from her, giving me the assurance that she was even better than when I left her."

"I am happy, most happy, to hear it," replied Ernest de Nogent; and then he fell into

a fit of thought, from which he did not rouse himself till he found the eyes of all present fixed somewhat intently upon him. He cast it off as soon as he perceived that such was the case, and made an effort to talk cheerfully on other subjects, in which he succeeded. But what the Count de Castelneau had observed, had cast him, in turn, into a reverie; and, notwithstanding all his natural command over himself, he could not resist the strong impression upon him, but remained till dinner was announced, somewhat silent and gloomy, occupied by one of those internal struggles which absorb all the energies of the mind, and leave the material organs to act merely as parts of a machine, moved by the great spring of habit.

By the time, however, that the meal was served, and he had sat down to table, he had again conquered: he had successfully repelled the assault of the evil spirit upon his heart, and driven him back, though the defences of the place might be injured by the siege that it had undergone. In such a warfare, men would do well to remember that the enemy is one who

never altogether raises that siege, but proceeds day after day, while the fortress crumbles down before him, unless some glorious and mighty help is sought and obtained to succour the distressed garrison.

At dinner, then, the Count de Castelneau resumed all his cheerfulness, spoke kindly and warmly to Ernest de Nogent, and could not help acknowledging to himself that in him there were evident, many excellent qualities, of which the Baron de Cajare had shown no sign. The Duke of Choiseul, on his part, had already remarked several things in the demeanour, both of the Count de Castelneau and of Ernest de Nogent, which excited his curiosity ; and he determined to unravel the mystery, if mystery there were ; but the task of prying into the heart of the Count de Castelneau was no slight one ; and notwithstanding all his penetration, Choiseul remained at fault.

The heart of Ernest de Nogent, however, was much more easily to be studied ; and as the duke led the conversation back to the subject of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and made

the young officer give the whole particulars of the adventure with the wolf, the changes of Ernest's countenance might have shown to eyes less penetrating than those which looked upon him, that there was a deeper interest in his bosom towards her whom he had saved than could arise from the incident itself, or from the effect of a mere passing acquaintance."

"Well, now, Ernest," said the duke, after the conversation had gone on for some time, "you shall let us know what *you* think of Mademoiselle de St. Morin. From something which Monsieur de Castelneau said a minute or two ago, I am inclined to believe that she is extremely beautiful. Is it not so, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"I really do not know," replied the count, "from what part of my discourse your lordship's keen wit has derived intimation of a fact which I am not at all inclined to deny. As far as my poor judgment goes, Annette is indeed most beautiful. But of course I am not so good a judge as young men."

"The deduction was very easy, Monsieur de

Castelneau," replied the duke, who rather prided himself upon the rapidity of his calculations. "What you said regarding Monsieur le Baron de Cajare led me at once to conclude that the young lady was very beautiful. You would not have suspected him of taking such rash measures unless you suspected him of being very much in love; and he is not a man to be much in love with any thing less than transcendent beauty."

The count smiled, but did not reply; and the duke went on to press his wife's nephew upon the subject, saying: "But come, Ernest, you have not answered my question. What is your opinion of the young lady's beauty?"

"I can but say that she is very beautiful," replied Ernest de Nogent, "indeed the most beautiful being that I ever beheld; for her beauty is not in her features alone, but in the expression, which is ever changing, but ever perfect."

"Hyperbole, hyperbole! my dear Ernest," cried the Duchess of Choiseul. "How can the expression be always changing, and yet always

perfect? If it is perfect at one moment, any change from that must be less perfect."

"Oh, my dear aunt," replied the young officer, "the Abbé Barthelemi has spoilt you, by teaching you metaphysics. Give me that ring off your finger."

"A modest request, indeed," said the duchess, but taking off the ring at the same time, and holding it out to her nephew.

"Look at this diamond," said Ernest de Nongent with a smile: "what colour does it reflect when I turn it thus?"

"Green," replied the duchess.

"And when I turn it thus?" demanded her nephew.

"Bright yellow," she replied.

"And thus?" he continued.

"Pure rose colour," was the answer.

"And each as bright as the other, my dear aunt, are they not?" continued Ernest de Nongent, giving her back the ring; "and such is the expression of Mademoiselle de St. Morin's countenance, ever varying, but always perfectly bright and beautiful."

“You deserve the ring for your illustration,” replied the duchess, rolling it across the table to him. “If the young lady’s heart be as much a diamond as you represent her person to be, she must, indeed, be worthy of the noblest race in France.”

Monsieur de Castelneau would fain have mused; but he struggled with himself, and overcame the temptation. Nay more, he took part again in the conversation regarding Annette, assured the Duchesse de Choiseul that her person afforded but a faint image of her heart and mind; and turning to the duke, he added, “—Just as it seems to me, my lord, that a picture, however masterly, is but an imperfect image of what we see in nature.”

The duke smiled to this return of what they had been speaking of before, and replied, “You are such an admirer of the beauties of nature, Monsieur de Castelneau, that, ere you return to Paris, I must take you through our park here in the direction of Versailles, where we have even more beauty than towards Arpajon.”

The conversation now deviated into other channels, and fell upon subjects of general interest till dinner was concluded. After a short pause in the saloon of the duchess, the duke proposed to Monsieur de Castelneau that they should walk forth into the park. Madame de Choiseul, however, remained at home; and Ernest de Nogent, though he would willingly have accompanied the Count de Castelneau, whose good opinion he was very desirous of cultivating, determined to stay with his aunt, not knowing what sort of communication the minister might be desirous of holding with his guest. The subjects started, however, were altogether general, and referred principally to matters of art and taste. Before they returned, indeed, the curious circumstance of Monsieur de Castelneau meeting his young neighbour Ernest de Nogent there, led the Duc de Choiseul on to speak of the young officer's character and family. Of Ernest himself he gave an account which, from the lips of the duke, was commendation indeed.

“ We love him scarcely less than if he were



our own son," he said; "but I have made it a point not to press any members of my own family into public employments. Fortune he has little or none, poor fellow, and must make his way with his sword; for, alas! so little flows into my coffers for my services to the state, and so much flows out of them to supply some of the necessities of the state\*, that though we may regret that we have no children of our own, it is probably far better that such is the case."

"I did not know, my lord," replied the count, "that the Duchesse de Choiseul had a sister, and still less did I know that her sister had married Monsieur de Nogent. I always understood that that gentleman had married a Mademoiselle de Lisle, while the duchess I remember well as the heiress of the noble house of Du Chatel."

\* This is known to have been absolutely the fact. The Duc de Choiseul having more than once supplied, from his own fortune, deficiencies in the revenue, which other ministers might have taken less generous means to fill up.

“True, true,” replied the duke, “Madam de Nogent was her half-sister — the same mother, but another father. Poor Marie de Lisle had little or no fortune of her own, and she married a man who had little fortune either. We minded not that, however, for his blood is as noble as any in France, and though a misalliance is what, of course, we could not have tolerated for a moment, we cared not for the accidental circumstances of fortune : — indeed, my sweet lady herself gave part of her own, to increase that of her sister.”

“Then notwithstanding all the fine new notions of the present day,” said the count, “you still hold, my lord duke, that there is something in noble blood which should prevent it from allying itself with that of an inferior class.”

“I trust, sir,” replied the Duke of Choiseul, raising his head, “that there is no gentleman of really pure blood in France that can think otherwise. These new notions that you speak of are but set abroad by men who would fain rise into our stations by any means; and we

should hold this barrier but the more firmly against them."

The count mused: the very same prejudices of birth which had been expressed by the Duc de Choiseul, he had himself combated a thousand times; but there was something in his heart which would not, on the present occasion, let him say one word in opposition to the duke's arguments. The minister remarked his silence, and asked, "Do you not think so, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"Perhaps I am not so strongly wedded to such opinions as you are," replied the count, with an evasion which he did not forgive himself for, even while he used it; "but so far I do think with you fully, that, though no means should be employed to prevent courage, genius, and exertion from raising a man to the very highest point in society, yet we should use all means to prevent any thing but virtue and talents from producing that result."

The Duke de Choiseul was not quite satisfied with this reply; but as it was a matter of no consequence, and they were now taking their

way homeward, he turned the conversation to the object which had brought the Count de Castelneau thither, and said, "Perhaps it may be better for you to see the king at once, when I have made my report to his majesty in regard to our interview of this morning. I shall go over to-morrow to Versailles about eleven; by the hour of noon my private audience will be at an end, and I will then introduce you to his majesty's presence, as well as Ernest, who has to make his peace, you hear. May I ask you to be kind enough to bring him down with you in your carriage to Versailles; for he must go back to Paris to-night, as it will be as well that he should not stop here, till he is reinstated in the royal favour?"

"I shall be most happy, my lord," replied the count. "Will not Monsieur de Nogent return in my carriage to Paris?"

"He came on horseback," replied the duke; "but doubtless he will prefer your society to a solitary ride."

The proposal was accordingly made: Ernest de Nogent accepted the offer gladly; and as the

carriage proceeded towards Paris, much conversation took place between him and his companion. It was of a pleasant and tranquil kind. Without knowing why, Ernest kept off the subject of Annette ; and the Count de Castelneau felt when he parted from him, that, under most circumstances, he could have made that man his friend

## CHAP. V.

THAT splendid monstrosity, the palace of Versailles, was certainly not in the same state of magnificence in which it had been placed by the vain ostentation of Louis XIV., but still it displayed a degree of luxury and extravagance which formed a painful contrast with the situation of a suffering and indigent population. There was also, in the aspect of the people who thronged its saloons and galleries, an air of dissolute frivolity, of careless, mocking superciliousness, which generally marks a court or country on the eve of its downfall. When the great of a nation have learned to feel a contempt for all those things that are in themselves good and great, the nation is soon taught to feel a contempt for the great; and, as a part of the nation, the Count de Castelneau felt no slight portion of scorn for all that surrounded him, as, accom-

panied by Ernest de Nogent, he walked through the crowded halls of the palace, towards the audience which had been promised him by the Duc de Choiseul. He, perhaps, more than any one else, felt and contemned the persons and the scene around him. His eye was fresh from purer things — his mind had been sanctified by a commerce with virtue, truth, and nature — and all the vice, and the idle levity, and the ostentatious nothingness which appeared before his sight, struck him as something new and horrible, though he had witnessed the same scene many a time before.

The conversation of Ernest de Nogent had not tended to smooth the way for the impression made by Versailles. There was a freshness about the young nobleman's mind — a truth, an eagerness, a candour — which harmonised well with the bright simplicity of God's own creations, but were a living reproach to the corrupted manners of that court. Without the slightest idea that the count could entertain towards him any but the most kindly feelings, knowing of no objections which could

be raised against his pretensions to Annette, except the comparative poverty of his house, he had striven frankly and freely to please her guardian during their short intercourse, and, in spite of very repugnant feelings in the breast of the count, had succeeded.

He was well known to many members of the court, but none knew or recognised the Count de Castelneau; and, as they moved on through those spacious halls, many a gay and glittering officer stopped Ernest de Nogent, spoke a word or two with him on his own account, and then, in a whisper, inquired who was his graver friend. There was something in the air of the count, however, in his calm, firm step, his thoughtful but self-possessed demeanour, the slight and somewhat scornful smile that curled his lip, and his stern, irrepressible eye, which produced a feeling of reverence in men who had reverence for very few things on earth, and made them give way before him when they might have jostled a man of superior station.

At length, as the count and his companion approached the door which communicated with



the king's apartments, without perceiving any sign of its having been opened that day, Ernest de Nogent asked one of the *garde du corps* if any one had been yet admitted.

“Oh, no !” replied the officer, “the king has not come from the *Parc au Cerfs*. He has got a fresh importation from Provence, and we may be kept these two hours.”

Ernest de Nogent gave a look of disgust, and turned towards the Count de Castelneau, as if to interpret what had been said, but the count bowed his head, and replied to the look — “I heard, my young friend, and understand ; such turpitudes, unhappily, fly far.”

The anticipation of the officer of the *garde du corps* did not prove exactly correct. For about half an hour longer the count and Ernest de Nogent were detained, hearing around them more licentious ribaldry, perhaps, than ever was spoken in any other court in Europe. Witty and brilliant it certainly was, as well as scandalous, malicious, and gross ; but that wit must always be of a somewhat feeble and debilitated

kind, which is obliged to have recourse to calumny and licentiousness to support it under either arm.

At length the door opened, and the Duc de Choiseul himself came forth, brilliantly habited in the costume of the times, and bearing a portfolio under his arm. He spoke a few words with his usual quickness and precision to several persons who stood round the door, and who each pressed for a word with the minister. But he pushed his way forward all the time, till his eyes fell upon the Count de Castelneau and Ernest de Nogent. The moment he saw them, he thrust another gentleman out of the way with very little ceremony, and said in a quick tone, as he beckoned them up, "Come with me, come with me, the king is waiting for you. Both," he added, seeing Ernest linger behind—"both of you."

They followed in silence; and when they had passed through the door into an anteroom, the duke whispered, "I need not tell you to be cautious. The king is in no very placable mood to-day. — Ernest, no rashness: remember how

you once offended when you were page of honour, by a thoughtless reply."

"I will be careful," replied the young officer; "for I must not do discredit to any thing you may have said in my favour."

Passing through another room, the duke led his companions to the door of the king's cabinet, where a page stood to guard against intrusion. The duke entered first; and then returning, brought the two gentlemen into the royal presence, saying, "Monsieur de Castelneau, sire! — and my nephew, Ernest de Nogent; whom you were good enough to say you would see together."

The only object worthy of remark in the cabinet when the count entered, was a gentleman dressed in black, who was seated at the opposite side of the chamber, with a table on his right hand, covered with writing materials, and his foot raised upon a stool. He was by no means a prepossessing person in appearance. Though his features, in themselves, were fine, there was a lack of feeling in his countenance — a want of soul in the whole expression,

that was very repulsive. There was nothing either inquiring, or gracious, or menacing in the face : all was cold ; and yet it was cold without dulness. You could not suppose, in looking on those features, that mind was wanting : it was merely an appearance of *want of interest* in the objects before him, tinged with contempt ; but that slight scornful turn of the lip was all that chequered the look of utter apathy with which he regarded the count and his companion.

The complexion of the king (for he it was) seemed to have once been delicate and womanish ; but the skin was now wrinkled with years, the cheeks had fallen in ; and a little rouge had evidently been added, where the colour had abandoned the cheek, rendering the monarch, any thing but more pleasing in appearance. His lips were thin and pale ; and it was impossible to gaze on him without feeling an impression that debauchery more than age had shared in the decay which no art could hide.

The Count de Castelneau, both on account of his age and rank, advanced first on entering

the room ; but the king called the young officer forward, saying, " Here, Ernest ; come hither ! So you thought fit to quit your regiment without leave, young man."

" Sire," replied Ernest de Nogent, advancing, " I applied for leave ; and only ventured upon the rash act which I did commit on account of my father's severe illness."

" You were very wrong, sir," replied the king. " There is no excuse for want of discipline."

" Most true, sire," answered the young nobleman ; " I am without excuse, and came not to urge any ; but merely to cast myself upon your majesty's clemency, trusting you will consider that sometimes our feelings overpower our reason, and that I hastened to my father's side when I heard he was at the point of death as wildly and inconsiderately as I might fly to the side of my king, did I hear he was in peril or in difficulty."

The monarch turned to the duke ; and the count observed, that whenever he spoke to his minister, the king's countenance relaxed into a

faint smile. "You say, duke, that he has received his reprimand?" he asked; and, on the duke bowing his head in token of assent, he went on, "Well, sir; I have left the matter in the hands of the general, and therefore I shall add nothing to what he has thought fit to do, except a warning to be more careful in future. — Now, Monsieur de Castelneau, what have you to say?"

"Very little, sire," replied the count, "except to wish your majesty good health and high prosperity."

The king turned to the Duc de Choiseul, and the Duc de Choiseul looked down, without replying, "Did you not tell me, my lord," said the king, "that the Count de Castelneau wished to speak with me?"

"Not precisely, sire," answered the duke. "You may recollect that some suspicions were excited."

"Oh yes, by the Baron de Cajare," replied the king; "I remember very well."

"Will your majesty permit me to remind you," said the duke, "that it was by no direct

accusation on the part of the baron; but by what he let fall regarding the retired way in which Monsieur de Castelneau lived, when he was speaking of the discontent that has manifested itself in Quercy and the Agenois."

"It continually happens, your majesty," said the Count de Castelneau, with a faint smile, "that when any one wishes to do us an injury, who is too cowardly to make a bold accusation, and too feeble to affect us by open efforts, he endeavours to degrade us in the opinion of those to whom we are most attached, by insinuating what he dares not assert; and where he is very mean and very contemptible indeed, he couches his insinuation in such terms as to leave the minds of the persons who hear to draw the deduction that he is afraid to point out himself. Such has been the case, it would seem, with the Baron de Cajare. He said nothing against me; but told your majesty that I was living a solitary and unsocial life, far from your royal court and person, in the same breath that he spoke of seditions in the neighbouring districts, and other things that

might well excite your indignation, leaving you to draw the inference that I had some share in these troubles. He forgot, however, to remind your majesty that I had been bred up for a profession which counsels retirement and seclusion; and that — though I never actually entered the church, and certainly did cast off my gown when I unexpectedly came into great wealth and high rank — I remained attached to the clerical profession as Abbé de Castelneau till I had passed the fortieth year of my age. He did not tell you, sire, as he might have told you, that these troubles were in a remote part of the province; that I neither had nor could have any thing to do with them; that I have never in my life taken any part in either a religious or a political dispute; that I have no communication with refractory parliaments; no dealings with Jesuits; no connection with Jansenists. All this the Baron de Cajare might have told your majesty at the same time; and had he done so, he would have prevented your suspecting for a moment one of your most faithful subjects.”

“You are eloquent, Monsieur de Castel-



neau," said the king, with the curl of his lip growing somewhat stronger; "pray, has the Baron de Cajare any cause of enmity towards you?"

The Duc de Choiseul hastened to interfere; for he knew that the king's mood at that moment was a very irritable and unsettled one.

"Monsieur de Castelneau has explained the whole to me, sire," he said: "there is no cause of enmity, indeed; but it would appear that Monsieur de Cajare would fain have the count take up his abode in Paris rather than remain at Castelneau."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the king, with more animation than usual; "how so? upon what account?"

"Why, it would seem, sire," replied the duke, thinking, perhaps, a little of Ernest de Nogent while he spoke, and forgetting the peculiar character and frightful licence of the person he addressed — "it would seem, sire, that Monsieur de Castelneau has a ward, a young lady of very extraordinary beauty — at least if I may judge by Ernest's account. With her

the Baron de Cajare has fallen in love; and as he is as much in love with Paris as the lady — and, indeed, cannot absent himself long from the capital — he wished to make your majesty and me the tools of bringing the count and his fair ward to Paris.”

A peculiar, unpleasant, simpering smile came upon the old king's face, as he asked, “Is she in Paris, then, Monsieur de Castelneau?”

“No, sire,” replied the count, “she is not; I left her behind.”

The Duc de Choiseul perceived at once, from that smile, the evil that he had done without thinking of it; and he hastened to the aid of Monsieur de Castelneau, saying, “Of course, sire, the count, at once suspecting the Baron de Cajare, and understanding his motives, did not choose to gratify him.”

“We must make him gratify the king,” said Louis XV., with the same meaning and detestable look.

The Count de Castelneau answered boldly, “In all honourable things, sire, none shall be found more ready to gratify you — Dishonour-

able things," he added, neither regarding a frown on the face of Louis nor a sign from the Duc de Choiseul, "my king knows himself and me, I am sure, too well to ask."

Louis's brow was as black as night, and his meagre hand grasped the side of his chair, while his foot beat the ground with a sharp quick movement. It was wonderful, however, how far he could conquer himself, when his passions or his vices required an effort; and after remaining in silence for a moment or two, he turned to Ernest de Nogent, asking, "Is she so very beautiful then, Ernest?"

The young nobleman would willingly have belied poor Annette's beauty, but he dared not tell a falsehood, and he replied, "She is, indeed, sire, very beautiful."

A dead pause ensued; no one of course wishing to renew the conversation but the king, and he not knowing very well how to carry it on farther for his own particular views and purposes. At length he said, turning to the duke, "The baron is in the Bastile, I think, Monsieur de Choiseul?"

“He is, sire,” replied the duke, hoping to engage another of the king’s passions, and make the one counteract the other : “his insolent disregard of your majesty’s express commands, when you directed him to avoid all personal interference with my nephew Ernest ; his going down into Quercy the very same day that he received notification of your wish to the contrary, taking with him, on his own authority, a guard, evidently for the purpose of disobeying your most strict orders — all these circumstances, sire, together with several others which I shall have to lay before your majesty ere long, when I have fully investigated them, made me instantly send down the deputy of the lieutenant-general to arrest this contumacious person, and lodge him in the Bastile. I examined him myself for an hour yesterday morning, and met with nothing but cool insolence both toward your majesty and myself.”

The duke had spoken at some length, in order to draw off the king’s attention ; but Louis was not to be led away from the subject predominant at that moment in his mind ; and

he asked quietly, "Pray, Monsieur de Choiseul, how long do you think it may be before the case is complete against the Baron de Cajare?"

The duke did not understand the king's object, and replied, "Perhaps not for six weeks or two months, sire; for there is a gambling piece of business, where all did not go quite fairly, it would seem, which must be inquired into. One of the party threw himself out of the window and was killed; but several of the officers who were present are now absent in Flanders and on the Rhine."

"Say three months — say three months, Monsieur de Choiseul," exclaimed Louis, — "we must have his conduct thoroughly sifted. Better say three months."

"It may very likely be as long as that, sire," replied the duke, who was completely deceived, and thought that he had carried off the king's attention from Annette de St. Morin. "Probably to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion we shall be that time, or more."

"Very well, then," said the king, turning to the count, "we shall command you, as you are

particularly interested in this business, to remain in Paris for the space of those three months, presenting yourself weekly at our court, in order that we may communicate with you upon the subject when we think fit. You will also, if you take our advice, send for your household, and bring this young lady from time to time to Versailles. We give her the invitation."

He spoke with an air of dignity, and a contracted brow; and when he had done he bowed his head slightly, to intimate that the audience was at an end.

The count and Ernest de Nogent retired without reply; but the moment they had passed through the antechambers and entered the general reception rooms, the young officer turned eagerly to the count, demanding, in a low voice, but with an air of terrible anxiety and apprehension, "What do you intend to do?"

"To obey the king's commands," replied the count calmly, "*but not to take his advice.*"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent eagerly. "Oh! Monsieur de Castelneau, be firm — I beseech you be firm."

“I will, my young friend,” replied the count, grasping his hand; “I will—though from what I have heard you say I should think that you would rather desire Mademoiselle de St. Morin’s presence in Paris, if I understand right that your regiment is quartered in the neighbourhood.”

“It is even now marching for Château Thierry,” replied the young officer; “but believe me, Monsieur de Castelneau, I would rather never behold Mademoiselle de St. Morin again, than behold her in the contamination of this place. You know not, you cannot know, all the dark and disgraceful secrets of this very building. It was bad enough when I was here as page of honour, nearly nine years ago, but I understand it is infinitely worse now.”

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when his name was called forth from the door of the king’s apartments by one of the attendants, and he was forced to go back to the presence of a monarch who was now labouring to blot out, by a course of tyranny and debauch-

ery, the memory of all those fair promises which the early part of his reign had afforded.

The count promised to wait for his young companion; and remained standing alone, busying himself with his own thoughts, and heeding but little the various faces that flitted by him. In about ten minutes Ernest de Nogent rejoined him, with a cheek burning, and an eye fixed anxiously on the ground. "I have kept you," he said — "I have kept you, I am afraid; and I owe any one an apology for making them breathe this air longer than their own business requires. Let us go, Monsieur de Castelneau, let us go."

Walking rapidly through the rooms, the two gentlemen quitted the palace, and, after some little difficulty, found the count's carriage, which was soon rolling with them on the road towards Paris.

"You seem agitated, my young friend," said the count, as Ernest sat beside him in silence, pressing his clasped hands hard together.

"I am indignant as well as agitated, Monsieur de Castelneau," replied Ernest. "I will



not offend your ear with that man's inquiries or discourse. I have marred my own fortunes for ever, I doubt not; but I care little for that, provided you remain firm, as you have quite the power to do."

"I give you my word of honour, my young friend," replied the count, "that were I to be kept here for ever, and my lodging were to be the Bastile to-morrow, on account of my determination, nothing should or shall induce me to send for Annette while the court is in its present degraded state. Sooner than she should come hither I would send her into a foreign country; for there is no state of banishment equal in anguish to that of virtue amongst evil doers. Let that satisfy you for the present, and remember that better days may yet come."

## CHAP. VI.

THE time had hung somewhat heavily upon the hands of Annette de St. Morin. She felt for some time the injury that she had received from her fall; she felt her loneliness, too, and the want of her daily conversation with her kind guardian. Her mind seemed to lack food, and her heart also; for there used to be something pleasant and sweet in the knowledge that there was always some one who loved her near at hand, even when she was roaming about the country alone and the count was at Castelneau. Now there was no one near; and though the library of the château was well stocked with books, she did not visit it often. She knew that there were many books there which her guardian did not wish her to peruse; and perfectly confident in his kindness and his judgment, she not only did not feel the least desire

to read those books, but was fearful lest she should open one of them by accident in seeking for something else. She therefore confined herself entirely to works which she had read before; and though a twice-read book may be less tedious than a twice-told tale, yet rare is the writing which will afford the same interest and pleasure the second time as the first.

Days slipped by, however, and weeks. She received letter after letter from her guardian; and each was so far satisfactory that it told her he was well, that any charge against him had been rebutted easily; and that he hoped speedily to return, though every one added that business might still detain him for a week or two longer in Paris. All this was true; but he told her not those facts which he might have found a difficulty in explaining to her pure and high mind. He told her not that the king had twice asked him whether she had yet come to Paris, and that he had been obliged to answer vaguely, that circumstances had prevented her from setting out. The last time he had made this reply, too, it had been received with a

frown ; and the count had then very plainly perceived that the time was approaching when he should be obliged to give a more definite explanation of his purposes regarding Annette. His letters, though calm and moderate in their expression, as was his conversation upon all ordinary occasions, breathed nothing but pleasure in the expectation of seeing her again at Castelneau. But still the days passed, and he appeared not ; and the brown autumn coming on showed Annette the yellow side of the leaf as she wandered round the woods of the château in solitude of feeling and of thought. That solitude was, however, somewhat cheered from time to time by the visits which she occasionally paid to the old Baron de Nogent ; and, after he had more fully recovered his health, by his visits to her in return.

Though he was still somewhat grave in his demeanour, the baron was with her more cheerful than with most people. There was something in the brightness of her youth and beauty which always produced a reflected sparkling from the minds of those around her ; and the

old nobleman spoke of many things whereof he would have spoken to none else : of the hope, and the happiness, and the early days which had passed away ; and dwelling thus upon the past, he forgot a little of the weariness of the present. The present, however, was not altogether forgotten ; for he told her of his son's health, and that the malice of the Baron de Cajare had been frustrated ; and he spoke also with enthusiasm of the Duke and Duchess of Choiseul, and of all the kindness which they had shown to Ernest.

That name sounded upon the ear of Annette with a thrilling interest which no other name could produce ; and though she never herself led the way to the subject, yet it was sweet to her to sit and listen as the baron spoke of his son. She did not venture, indeed, to mingle much with the conversation when it took that turn : there was something in her heart which made her afraid of what her tongue might say ; and she even pronounced the name, when it was necessary, with a degree of timidity which alarmed her for her own feelings, and made

her fear that others might discover them, and suppose them to be deeper and stronger than they really were. It may be a question, however, and a difficult one to answer, whether Annette did herself know what was the depth and strength of those feelings. Another question might be, whether the baron did at all discover what their nature was.

Annette often asked herself whether Ernest had told his father the words which he had spoken to her on their last interview ; for she frequently remarked in the baron's eyes, when he spoke to her, a look of interest and tenderness which she could account for in no other way than by supposing that he knew the feelings of his son, and felt affection for her whom that son loved. Then, again, she would ask herself, did Ernest really love her ? and the timidity of her young heart would call up like spectres all the tales that she had heard of men's fickleness and inconstancy, and of the cruel trifling with which they will sometimes crush a woman's heart as a child does a butterfly. But, in her own innocence and truth, though she had heard of such

things, though she believed that perhaps they might occasionally occur, she could not and would not apply the lesson individually, she could not and would not believe that Ernest de Nogent would so act.

She rested then in hope; and one day, having wandered forth upon her accustomed walk, to muse and ponder on all the many things—some sweet, some touched with sadness, but none exactly bitter—that were busy with her imagination at this time, she went on farther than she had been lately accustomed to, and approached the cross and the fountain, which she had not visited on foot since her adventure with the wolf. Fate seemed to guide her thither strangely as to the scene of important events; for although what I am about to relate may seem but a trifle, it marked an epoch in the life of Annette de St. Morin.

She had scarcely reached the fountain, and was gazing in the cool and refreshing mirror that it afforded, when she saw the good old Baron de Nogent riding down on horseback towards her. He was unattended; and as

soon as he saw her he dismounted and approached, throwing the bridle of his horse over his arm.

“ I was just coming to visit you, my dear young lady,” he said. “ I have not seen you for a week, and I know not why or how, an impression came upon my mind last night that you were either ill, or that some accident had happened to you. It is ridiculous to yield to such superstitious feelings, I confess; but I could not resist the inclination I felt to inquire after you this morning myself.”

Annette smiled and thanked him, and left her fair hand in his, as he held it and gazed in her face, like a father looking at his child; and after she had assured him that she was well and happy, he asked if she had lately heard from Paris.

She replied in the affirmative, saying that her guardian had written, only the day before, a long and interesting letter, telling her, that in all probability he should soon return to Castelneau.

Even as they were speaking, one of the ser-



vants from the château was seen coming up with great speed, carrying a small packet in his hand. As soon as he could recover breath, he told her that a courier had just arrived from Paris, after travelling night and day. He had brought her that letter, the man said, from the count, and was ordered to deliver it without a moment's delay, as it was of very great importance.

Annette's first question was, "Is he well?" and even while she spoke, she opened the letter with a trembling hand, fearing to find some evil tidings.

"The courier said, mademoiselle," replied the servant, "that the count was quite well, and that nothing had happened amiss."

Annette read the letter eagerly, and then asked, in a thoughtful tone, "Who was it brought this letter?"

"I don't know his name, I am sure," replied the servant: "he was none of our own people, but some one whom my lord has hired in Paris, it seems."

Again Annette mused; and the good baron, seeing that she was embarrassed, and apparently

not well pleased, inquired, "Is there any thing that I can do to assist you, my dear child? Can I give you advice or help? for something seems to surprise and embarrass you."

"This letter does very much," cried Annette, still holding it in her hand. "Go back, good Jerome, and tell the courier I am about to return home directly. Pray come with me, Monsieur de Nogent, and I will consult with you as I go."

The baron willingly agreed; and giving his horse to the servant to ride back to the castle, he drew Annette's arm through his, and walked slowly on with her. As soon as the man was out of hearing, she gave the letter into the hands of Monsieur de Nogent, saying, "It is very strange that my guardian should have written yesterday so very differently in every respect; that yesterday he should tell me he would return to Castelneau in a few days, whereas now he bids me come to Paris immediately."

"It certainly is strange," replied the baron; "but there may be many causes for it, my

dear young lady, of which we can tell nothing. There is only one thing I would remark, which is, that the style of the letter is not altogether like the style in which Monsieur de Castelnau speaks. You must know better than I do, however — are you sure that it is his own hand?”

“Oh yes, quite sure,” replied Annette: “there can be no doubt of that. The word Annette, indeed, is not exactly as he usually writes it, but it is certainly his handwriting, I think. Yet I cannot help looking upon it as strange, and fearing that he must be in prison, or ill, or distressed in mind; for there is a sort of restraint, as you observe, in the style which is not at all usual with him.”

“We will speak with this courier,” said the Baron de Nogent, “and perhaps may learn more from him; but I do remark strongly the same restraint and forced style that you speak of. The letter is so short, too: it is more like the order of the day from a military commander, than from a guardian to his adopted child, whom he loves as well, I am sure, as if she were his own: there is something strange about the

business which I do not understand; but our only means of ascertaining the truth, is by inquiring all the particulars from this courier."

With such conversation they proceeded on their way till they reached the Château of Castelneau. In passing through the lower hall they found a man covered with dust seated at a small table in the corner, for the great table at which the servants and retainers generally dined had been removed. He was eating voraciously, and was a tall, stout, merry-looking personage, with one eye blind and closed up. He was well dressed, however, as a courier, with his close-fitting blue jacket covered with gold lace, his large heavy riding boots, weighing some twenty or thirty pounds, still upon his legs, his hat, with a flat band of feathers, thrown down upon the ground beside him, and his strong *couteau de chasse*, or short hunting sword, in the buff belt over his shoulder.

The baron paused, eyeing him for a moment, and then asked, "Are you the courier who brought a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin not long ago?"

The man nodded his head, without rising or ceasing his meal, saying, "I am, sir, the Count de Castelneau's courier, and mademoiselle's very humble servant."

"Then be so good," said the baron, somewhat sternly, for he did not like the man's tone, — "then be so good as to follow us to the saloon directly. Mademoiselle has a question or two to ask you, my good friend."

"In a moment, in a moment, sir," replied the courier, in the easy, off-hand tone he had before used, at the same time swallowing two more enormous mouthfuls, and pouring out one half of a bottle of good Cahor wine into the horn-cup that stood by his side. "Sir, your good health — Mademoiselle your good health;" and setting down the cup upon the table, after having drained it of its contents, he rose and followed the baron and Annette to the saloon in which she usually sat.

As soon as they were there, the baron fixed his eyes upon the courier, with a frown, saying, with marked emphasis, "You seem to be a very saucy personage."

"I am, sir," replied the man, coolly; "never was a truer word spoken."

"Pray do you know," said the baron, "the way in which we treat saucy companions in Quercy?"

"No, indeed, sir," replied the courier; "may I ask how?"

"We tie them by the leg," said the baron, "and give them three dips head foremost in the Dordogne. Its waters are considered a sovereign cure for cool impudence; and if the Dordogne can't be met with, the Lot will do, or any pond in the province — Stay, stay, where are you going?"

"To get to my horse's back as fast as possible," replied the man, still moving toward the door; "for if I remain here I shall be drowned in three days."

"Stop!" said the baron, in a tone of authority: "if you do not, I will have you stopped in a way that you may not like. We do not suffer such gentry to go out of the province without curing them: but be so good as to answer this young lady and myself a few questions with

plain and simple truth, and in civil language, and you may escape such ablutions."

"Very well, sir, very well," said the man, in a humble tone, "I will do as you command, if I can; but habit is a terrible thing—habit is a terrible thing—and habit and nature have been the ruin of me."

"Pray, sir, is this letter the count's writing?" demanded the baron, pointing with his finger to the letter.

"As I hope to escape the Dordogne," replied the man, "I cannot tell. I neither taught him to write, nor saw him write it."

"But who gave it to you? that is the question," continued the baron.

"A gentleman calling himself the Count de Castelneau," replied the courier, "and occupying the great hotel at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques."

The baron looked at Annette, and Annette at the baron, for that was certainly the house which the count had occupied ever since his arrival in the capital.

"But tell me," said the sweet voice of An-

nette, "of what complexion and appearance was the gentleman who gave you the letter, and called himself, as you say, the Count de Castelneau?"

"He is a tall, good-looking person, mademoiselle," replied the courier; "not quite so long and so lean as monsieur here, but somewhat paler in the face, with a bluish sort of beard, like the Turkish gentleman they talk about, and as grave and quiet as the same gentleman after he had cut off his last wife's head."

The description, though somewhat caricatured, was not to be mistaken, and the baron went on:—"How long have you been in his service?"

"At the present moment," replied the man, "I have been in his service just four days and five hours; that is to say, five hours before I set out from Paris, and four days upon the journey."

"In fact, no time at all," said the baron; "but merely hired to bring the letter down to this place."

"Something like it, but not quite," answered the man: "the count did want a courier, and



sent for the first he could find; but he hired me to bring the letter, and to go back with the young lady, after which I am to be established courier in ordinary."

Neither the baron nor Annette had any means of judging whether the man's story was or was not true; and, moreover, when they came to ask themselves what reasonable cause there existed either for doubting the truth of the courier's tale, or for suspecting the letter not to be genuine, they found it difficult to assign any, and both were forced to admit that the style being slightly constrained was by no means sufficient to warrant the supposition that the count had not written that epistle. These thoughts were passing in the mind of both at the same moment; and the only farther questions which were put to the man were, "When did you quit Paris? and what is your name, my good friend?"

"On Monday, and my name is Pierre Jean," replied the man, adding nothing farther.

"That is your Christian name," said the baron; "what is your surname?"

“Pierre Jean,” replied the man — “my only name is Pierre Jean—that is the name my god-fathers and godmothers gave me at my baptism; and I should be sorry to throw it off because it is a little worn out about the knees. Pierre Jean is the name I have been known by all my life, and the only name I answer to; nor do I see any reason why a man who has never in life had more than two shirts should go about the world with the ostentatious frippery of three names upon his back.”

“But what was your father’s name?” demanded the baron, after thinking for a moment.

“Lord bless you, sir!” replied the man, “I never had a father—I am a great deal too poor to indulge in the luxury of ancestors. My mother’s name I have forgotten, though she lived till I was some six years old; but as to a father, Heaven defend me! I never had such a thing that I know of—if I had, I might have been burdened with an inheritance, and brothers and sisters, and all sorts of things of that kind.”

The baron smiled; for there was a drollery

about the man's very impudence which was difficult to be resisted; and, after asking Annette whether she had any more questions to put, he told the courier that he might retire and finish his meal. In the course of a consultation with his young friend which followed, the baron compared some of the count's former letters with the one which had been received that day, and this comparison left no doubt upon their minds that the letter was perfectly genuine.

"Whatever may be my father's motive," said Annette, "now that I am satisfied it is from him, I must of course set off directly, though I have a feeling of dread in regard to Paris — a dislike to visit that great, wide, heartless place, which I cannot overcome."

"Sooner or later," replied the old nobleman, "you would have to visit it, beyond all doubt, and perhaps now, as well as at any other time, when wisely guided and strongly protected, you have nothing to fear from its arts or its dangers. To one person, at least," added the baron, "your visit will give unfeigned pleasure: you

know that Ernest is now in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital."

The blood flew warmly into Annette's face, and she murmured something not very distinct about the pleasure she should have in meeting him again; and then added, that she had better send down to Figeac for horses.

"It is impossible, my dear child," said the baron, "that you can go to-night; recollect that it is now past four o'clock. Before you could send, and your messenger return, it would be much too late to set out, even if you could make the preparations necessary for your journey. Besides, you must not go alone. Who do you take with you?"

"Oh! I will take good Donnine," replied Annette, "and old Jerome, and another man with the carriage. Besides, there is this courier, you know."

The baron mused for a moment or two with a thoughtful and somewhat melancholy countenance; but in the end he said, with a sigh, "I am afraid it must be so. I would fain go with you, my dear young lady, but there are two or

three circumstances which would render it wrong for me to do so. There is no danger of any kind, I believe, to be anticipated, and perhaps I may be enabled to do as much for you here as I could on the road."

Some more conversation of the same kind took place ; and the exact course which Annette was to pursue from town to town was settled between her and the baron, whose experience in such matters was of course much greater than her own. This having been done, and a messenger despatched to Figeac to order horses for the ensuing day, the baron took leave of her and returned to Castel Nogent ; and Annette, after having made every preparation for her departure at a very early hour on the following morning, retired to seek rest, but for some time was not successful in finding it. She was somewhat agitated, if not apprehensive : it was the first time that she had ever been called upon to act and direct, on any great occasion, and, in short, to exercise, without guidance or support, all those powers of mind which are necessary to every one, even in the common affairs of

life. All this moved her considerably, and, when she fell asleep at length, her sleep was disturbed by dreams of the wildest and the most varied kind. Once or twice, however, through those dreams, the form of Ernest de Nogent appeared before her, and his voice sounded in her ear; and thus, after a time, the pleasanter images predominated, and she woke with a smile upon her countenance.

## CHAP. VII.

As every one must know who has tried it, and as every person who may happen to be as inexperienced as Annette will be more especially convinced of whenever they do try it, the appointment of a particular hour for departure is not the slightest guarantee whatsoever that the departure will take place for one or two hours afterwards. Of this fact poor Annette soon became sensible. She had particularly expressed a wish that every thing should be ready at a stated time; but nothing, of course, was ready at the time stated. Her own clothes took a considerable time to pack in the large heavy carriages of those days; the clothes of Donnine took longer still; and the clothes of Annette's maid took longer than all.

The only person who was prepared to mount and set out at a moment's notice was Pierre

Jean, the two-shirted courier, who, to say the truth, was a braggart even in the matter of linen, having but one shirt, which was the one upon his back. Thus, not being very much encumbered with baggage, his external preparations were easily made, and the château being ever well supplied, he employed the time, which others were spending upon the packing of the carriage, in making internal preparations for the journey which went on for a considerable length of time.

Before all was ready for Annette's departure, the good old Baron de Nogent himself appeared. He was accompanied by a servant on horseback, to whom he gave a letter, with orders to carry it to Figeac, in order to go by the ordinary post; but Pierre Jean was at his elbow while giving these directions, and, forgetting the lessons of the preceding evening, the courier instantly interfered, offering to carry the letter to Paris himself, and saying, "It will go more safely, depend upon it: the post is very doubtful now-a-days."

"I would always rather trust an accredited



scoundrel, sir, than an irresponsible one," said the baron; "and, judging from the time that you took to come hither, my letter, which I wish to reach Paris immediately, would take too long in your hands to answer my purpose."

"I came wonderfully fast, sir," said the man, in his usual cool impudent tone. "I was detained on the road, it is true, but that was by a rascally wrong-headed beast of a horse, which threw me eleven times in nine miles. Every time I lighted upon my head, and consequently the argument which we held with each other, the question, the reply, and the rejoinder, took up a considerable length of time."

The baron looked at him for a moment thoughtfully, and then said, "You have other business to attend to than carrying letters, let me remind you; and it will be well for you to recollect, that upon your conduct during the journey with Mademoiselle de St. Morin will depend whether you are amply rewarded or very severely punished. The Count de Castelleau, as perhaps you know, is not a man to

leave you an ear upon your head if any evil betide his ward by the way."

"Sir," replied the courier, making him a low bow, and winking his available eye, "I will take care of my ears: I will obey the orders I receive to a tittle, and I will have regard to all due cautions and proper counsels."

The baron then left him, with a few words more of warning, and proceeded to seek Annette, who, in about half an hour, entered the carriage, and bade her good old friend adieu, while the wheels rolled her away from the calm and pleasant scenes of Castelneau, where she had spent so many a happy day.

It was a sweet, yellow, autumnal morning; and the low sun was casting long shadows from the towers and walls of the château, and from the magnificent old trees that appeared round about it, some of which—the yews, for instance, that stood in the western angle—were supposed to be coëval with itself. Annette looked forth from the window of the carriage, and she thought that there seemed—in the solemn and

tranquil aspect of the place—in the cool morning light sleeping undisturbed on the green slopes and rounded forest tops—in those long shadows moving as if they moved not, so slowly and deliberately as the sun went on his way that no eye could detect the change as they advanced—there seemed in it all, she thought, a warning, an admonition to avoid the false glare and glitter, the hurrying gaiety, the fluttering lightness of the scenes in which she was about to mingle, to love still what she had loved well and holily from infancy to womanhood, and to let her heart dwell with the calmer, higher, grander things of earth, till her spirit, ready and prepared, should take wing for the mighty realisation of all bright hopes in heaven. To her mind all the things around her seemed to bid her farewell, calling upon her to return unchanged, as if it were the solemn voice of maternal love that spoke. There was something awful and sublime in the parting from those sweet scenes of her early youth, and she gazed with affectionate tenderness till the last pinnacle

of the castle sunk behind the trees, and then, drawing back her head, she covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and wept.

Donnine, on her part, did not understand such emotion at all; for she could conceive nothing but joy and satisfaction to any one in going to rejoin her beloved master, even were it at the very greatest sacrifice. She liked Castelnau well enough as a residence, but she did sometimes think it rather dull; she did sometimes regret the gay city in which many of her early days had been passed; and, if the truth must be told, she was more glad to join the count there than she would have been any where else, forgetting that the light-heartedness of youth, which had seasoned the pleasures of the capital, had now passed away from her, and might have left them tasteless. She tried to comfort her young lady, however, to the best of her power; but, alas! when those who strive to console us under grief, or soothe us in agitation, are incapable of comprehending the very causes of our emotion,

how tediously their words fall upon the ear ! what a grinning mockery is consolation without sympathy !

“ Hush, Donnine, hush ! ” said Annette gently. “ You do not understand, my good Donnine. I am not grieved : only a little agitated at thus having to go, for the first time, into the world alone.”

“ Oh, you are frightened ! ” cried Donnine. “ Is that it, my dear lady ? Take courage, take courage ! The world is not so bad a place as people call it. I warrant you, you will not find a gay cavalier in all Paris who will not be right glad to pull off his hat to you, and cast himself at your feet.”

“ I think you know Paris well, Donnine,” replied Annette with a faint smile, knowing that as long as she appeared melancholy the good old lady would not cease to importune her.

“ Know Paris well ! ” exclaimed Donnine. “ Indeed do I ! Many a pleasant hour have I spent there. Why, did I not bring you from Paris myself, mademoiselle, when you were an

infant? If any one should know Paris I should, I think, for there never passed a spring during thirty years that I did not spend four months in Paris. Alack, that I should not have seen it for well nigh twenty years — no, not twenty: nineteen years come next April. It is a long time to be out of Paris;” and once having set out upon such an interesting subject, she went on without the assistance of an answer till Annette became more tranquil.

When the carriage stopt for the night, the small and unimportant difficulties and embarrassments of giving orders and directions in regard to every thing, for the first time in her life, occupied Annette’s mind, and whiled away the slight shade of melancholy that still remained. She was one whose natural sweetness of disposition qualified her well to pass through all the minor obstacles that strew our path, with ease and happiness to herself and others. There was no such thing as irritation in her nature, and she smiled at many things which would have grieved a more fretful disposition. Perhaps this might be one of the causes why

her conduct and demeanour won so much upon every body that surrounded her; so that the love and affection of all who knew her well, followed her in all directions; and it was not possible for even new acquaintances to resist that peculiar charm which is always found in sweetness of temper and true kindness of heart.

Two or three times, during the course of the evening, the bold and somewhat saucy courier, who had borne her the letter from Paris, presented himself under various pretences in the room where she was sitting, and the effect of her manner and tone, even upon him, was very evident. His countenance took a more respectful expression; he seemed to listen with pleasure to her voice; and when he quitted the room, it was remarked that he seemed in some degree more thoughtful than usual, falling once or twice into a deep reverie.

His companions of the road, however, observed that from these meditations he always roused himself, rubbing his hands, and murmuring one particular exclamation, which was, "*Deux cens écus, et tout payé!*" Two hundred

crowns, and every thing paid ! Whatever was the course of argument of which this was the climax, the latter words seemed to him perfectly satisfactory and conclusive ; and he resumed forthwith his gay and nonchalant impudence, breaking his jests upon every body, and never returning a very civil or serious answer to any question that was asked him.

Early on the following morning, Annette was again upon her way from Limoges, and passing on through the hilly country which lies between Limoges and Morterol, she paused there at a little inn to take some refreshment. When Annette had dined, and was just about to order fresh horses, her *soubrette* came in, and whispered in her ear, with a face of some mystery and alarm, that she had heard the new courier making manifold inquiries as to whether two or three persons, whom he had described, had passed by Morterol. Annette, however, was not naturally timid : the suspicions regarding this man, which she had at first entertained she knew not well why, had by this time passed away, and she now only



replied, " He is asking for some of his friends, I suppose, Mariette."

The girl seemed not so well satisfied as her mistress; but nevertheless the horses were ordered, and the carriage proceeded on its way. Annette herself could not now help remarking that there was something extraordinary in Monsieur Pierre Jean's proceedings. He rode hither and thither, passed and repassed the carriage, and certainly seemed as if he were anxiously looking for some thing or person that did not appear. The young lady naturally became somewhat anxious; and calling him to the side of the carriage, she asked what was the matter. He replied that nothing was wrong, and that he was only looking for some friends of his, who were going on their way to Bordeaux; but he thought they must have passed, he added, for they had quitted Paris at the same time as himself.

As every one must have experienced to their cost, who has followed the road from Limoges to Châteauroux, this part of the journey, though the country is varied and beautiful, is gene-

rally tedious, from the slowness with which the vehicle is forced to proceed, continually climbing or descending steep hills, which prevent any thing like rapid progression. Such was the case with Annette; there was no inn or town of any importance where she thought proper to sleep, between Morterol and Argenton; and as she was now a little apprehensive, from the somewhat strange conduct of the man who accompanied her, she saw the day wear away in this slow advance with some anxiety.

The sun was not far above the sky, when she reached the old post-house of Le Fay, and the postmaster, who was also an innkeeper, strove to persuade her to stay there. The aspect of the place, however, did not please her; and calculating rightly that she would have time to reach Argenton before it was quite dark, she gave orders for proceeding quickly; and in about an hour and a half she came within sight of that picturesque little town, with its rocks and vineyards, and the Creuse flowing on through the midst.

It must be confessed that it was a pleasant

sight to Annette ; but now that she had reached it in safety, she reproached herself for her fears, and was convinced that she had doubted the courier unjustly. It soon appeared that he had remarked her suspicions ; for when the bustle of arrival was over, he presented himself, and said, “ You thought my riding about very strange, mademoiselle, and so it was ; but as I came down from Paris, I heard, about Le Fay and Morterol, that there was a gang of robbers on the road, and I was afraid of what might happen.”

Annette answered sweetly and gently ; and, after asking the man a few more questions, she dismissed him for the night. On leaving her presence, he again fell into one of those reveries which we have before remarked, but soon resumed his gaiety. The young lady, however, set out again from Argenton on the following day, with a mind more at rest ; and every thing passed calmly and quietly as she proceeded through the varied and beautiful country which lies between Argenton and Lottier, although the day was somewhat dull and the sky grey

and heavy. After passing Lottier, as the morning advanced, a fine drizzling rain began to fall, and the country changed its character altogether, and presented those wide wastes of moorish common land which border for several leagues the great forest of Châteauroux. The absence of the sun rendered the south-easterly wind cold and chilly, and the prospect was dull and cheerless to the eye. A little farther on, however, the road entered the forest of Châteauroux; and some fine scenery would have been presented amongst the glens, had it not been for the cold and dreary greyness of the atmosphere, which, though it did not prevent one from seeing up the long avenues of the forest, and down into the deep dells, gave every object a dark and cheerless aspect, and made the deer, which every here and there were seen either standing at gaze or bounding swiftly across, seem like the ghosts of some of the former tenants of the wood slaughtered by the hounds in ages long ago.

As the carriage rolled slowly along through the sandy road, Annette thought she saw once

or twice something like a human form at a distance; but as she knew that Châteauroux could not be far off, she did not entertain any apprehension, and calculated fully upon reaching Vierzon that night. At length, however, in a detached part of the wood which — though now entirely separate from the rest, and known by the name of the Bois de Niherne — was evidently a portion of the great forest itself, just as the carriage had reached the bottom of a somewhat deep descent, it was suddenly surrounded by five or six men on horseback. Two placed themselves at the heads of the horses, several others watched the two men-servants who accompanied the vehicle, and another, riding up to the side, exclaimed, “*De par le roi!*”

Annette had heard those words before; but quite certain of never having in her life done, said, or thought any thing which could call down upon her the royal indignation, she rapidly compared the appearance of the man who spoke with that of Pierre Morin, and such of his followers as she had seen from the windows

of Castel Nogent, and she concluded at once, that the official character which these men pretended to bear was falsely assumed.

“If it is my purse you want, gentlemen,” she said, calling all her courage to her aid — “If it is my purse you want, here it is at your service; but I beseech you to let me go on to Châteauroux as fast as possible; for ——”

“You mistake, mademoiselle, you mistake,” replied the man in a rough tone: “we are no robbers; this is no robbery; it is an *enlèvement de police*. We have warrant for what we do. What made you think we were robbers?”

“Because you are dressed so differently from the police that I have seen,” replied Annette: “but if you be really officers of police, you must be making a mistake. I have never done any thing, or dreamt of doing any thing, which should give cause of complaint.”

“We are not making a mistake, mademoiselle,” replied the man: “we know you quite well, and all about you. Your name is Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and you come from Castelneau. You are on your way to Paris;

but we will take you by a shorter road than Châteauroux."

"Then I have been very much deceived," said Annette, looking up and down the road for the courier Pierre Jean, who was nowhere to be seen; "though I still do not understand, if you be of the police, what was the use of deceiving me from Castelneau hither."

"I have nothing to do with deceiving you," replied the man, in a sharp tone; "but all I have to say is, with me you must come; and you are to consider yourself a prisoner from this moment."

Annette felt an inclination to weep; but by a strong effort she kept down the tears, and merely bowed her head, saying, "Of course I must submit."

The man who had spoken to her then dismounted from his horse, gave the bridle to one of those who followed, and, after addressing a few words to the postilions, returned to the side of the carriage, opened the door, and took his seat opposite to Annette. The carriage then began to move forward, surrounded by the men

on horseback, till it reached a place where the road divided into two, and a finger-post appeared inscribed on the one side with the words, "To Châteauroux," while the other bore "To St. Vincent."

The latter road was by far the narrower and the worse of the two; but up it the postilions turned their horses' heads, and shortly afterwards the carriage stopped at a little hamlet where four horses were waiting. They were ready harnessed, but after a very different fashion from the horses of the post houses. As soon as the carriage paused, the beasts which had drawn Annette thither were taken off and the others were put on, and, in place of postilions, a coachman mounted the box. These proceedings, more than any thing which had yet passed, convinced Annette that she was really in the hands of the police; for she knew that it was contrary to law for any one but a king's officer to change from the royal post on any account, after having commenced a journey in that particular manner.

She summoned courage, as soon as the vehicle



again began to move, to inquire of the person who sat opposite to her, what was the nature of the offence with which she was charged. The man smiled at her simplicity, and replied, "Are you not well aware that I know no more than you? You will hear all the particulars soon enough, my pretty lady. Do not be afraid that your offence will be concealed from you."

There was an unpleasant familiarity in the man's manner which displeased and frightened Mademoiselle de St. Morin; and that familiarity increased rather than diminished as they proceeded on their way, till, exerting the native dignity of her character, when he dared, on one occasion, to address her with impertinent levity, she gave him a severe rebuke that sunk him into sullen silence.

She particularly remarked, however, a fact which seemed to her very strange; namely, that their journey was conducted by roads which were any thing but good, and that in the whole of their progress, during four entire days, they never entered one single large city. On the fifth day, indeed, they came to the small place

called Malesherbes, which was the largest town, if it could so be called, which Annette had yet seen since she quitted Argenton. Their repose for the night had previously been in small inns of a dreary and desolate character ; and during the first two or three days she had met with no very kind or careful treatment ; but as she drew near Paris, the conduct of the leader of the party in whose custody she was underwent a change : he became more respectful and attentive, and asked once or twice whether she had every thing to make her comfortable.

From Malesherbes the carriage took a road on the left of that towards Fontainebleau ; and after going on for four or five hours, it stopped before some iron gates to the right. One of the men on horseback dismounted and opened the gates, and, passing along an avenue, nearly a mile in length, the vehicle rolled on till it stopped before an elegant building in a modern style of architecture, forming a small country house or château, with a porch supported by four Ionic pillars.

## CHAP. VIII.

It was in the little saloon at Chanteloup, which was particularly appropriated to the Duchess of Choiseul, and which by the taste and kindness of her husband was filled with inestimable pictures, each small in size, but each well deserving that often misapplied epithet, exquisite, that the lady of the mansion and her nephew were seated, some seven or eight weeks after the visit to Versailles which we have commemorated in another chapter. Ernest de Nogent — as was often his custom with an aunt that he loved — had seated himself on a stool at the feet of the duchess and was gazing up in her face, while she, looking down upon him, was asking with an air slightly playful, though with a certain touch of sadness in it too, —

“ And so, Ernest, you have leave of absence for three months ? ”

“ Yes, my dear aunt,” he said, “ I have that leave, thanks to my most kind uncle, I am sure, though he will not own it.”

“ And so, Ernest,” continued the duchess in the same meditative tone, and gazing on him with the same look — “ and so you are going down with all speed to spend your holyday at Castle Nogent ?”

“ True, dear aunt,” he replied ; “ where could I be better than by my father’s side ?”

“ And so, Ernest,” proceeded the duchess, without a change of manner, “ the end of all this matter is, you are in love ?”

Ernest looked down thoughtfully on the floor for a moment or two, and then turned his eyes again to the duchess, replying frankly, “ Perhaps, my dear aunt, it is so.”

“ Alas ! poor youth,” exclaimed the duchess. “ Did you consider well, when you undertook to do this rash thing of falling in love, all the griefs, and the discomforts, and anxieties, and emotions which you have yet to feel, and how often you may meet with bitter disappointment ? and did you recollect all the pains and troubles

of affection? — I do not see what young men, with all the pleasures of life and youth glowing round about them, have to do with love. They should leave it to old women like myself. We are the only fit people for it, Ernest, you may depend upon it, whatever the world may think.”

“ Why, my dear aunt, have you not often told me, that you married my uncle when you were a mere child, and that you have always loved him throughout life ? ”

“ Ay, Ernest,” replied the duchess ; “ but I loved him first as a child, and then as a young woman, and now as an old woman, and I feel that the last is the deepest and the brightest after all, Ernest.”

“ Well, then, my dear aunt,” replied Ernest, “ I intend to follow the same plan as near as possible. To love her now as a young man, and to love her hereafter as an old one.”

“ Well, I suppose, you must have your own way,” replied the duchess, laughing ; “ but tell me, who this Mademoiselle de St. Morin is ? Who was her father ? ”

Ernest was about to reply very truly, that

he had never inquired, and knew nothing about the matter; but at that moment one of the attendants entered the room, bearing a letter which he presented to the young officer. "Your groom, sir," he said, "has brought this from Paris post haste, though it came by the ordinary courier, seeing that it is marked *with speed, with urgent speed.*"

"It is my father's hand," said Ernest, taking it; "what can be the matter?" and immediately imagination and affection, as he recollected the delicate state of his father's health, called up a thousand pale fears from the bottom of his heart, and made them settle in his cheek.

"Open the letter, Ernest, open the letter!" cried the duchess; "we can encounter realities always better than fancies!"

Ernest tore open the letter and read aloud. "My dear boy," it went, "I write to you in haste, to tell you of an event which may be of importance, but which may be of none. Whilst I was yesterday visiting our sweet neighbour at Castelneau, a courier arrived bearing a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin, signed by her

guardian, and bidding her instantly to set out to join him in Paris. There was something in the writing and the style difficult to be defined, which made the dear girl and myself suspect that the letter was not genuine; the appearance of the courier, too, who will give himself no other name than Pierre Jean, was in every respect against him; but we could elicit nothing from him, but matter which tended to confirm the genuineness of the letter. As such a call to join her guardian was in no degree improbable, and as we could not discover a likely motive why any one should attempt to deceive her, it is determined that she shall set out this morning. An apprehension, however, rests upon my mind which I cannot shake off, and I, therefore, send you these lines, that you may instantly communicate with Monsieur de Castelneau, and learn whether the letter be of his writing or not. I despatch this by the ordinary courier, as he will arrive in Paris long before Mademoiselle de St. Morin; and I will only farther add, that she goes by the way of Châteauroux and Orleans."

“The villains!” exclaimed Ernest de Nogent,” as he concluded the letter — “The villains! But I must fly to Monsieur de Castelneau directly.”

“Is it not his own doing, think you?” demanded the duchess, somewhat surprised at her nephew’s agitation. “Indeed you lovers puzzle me, Ernest. Why should you be so furious at the idea of seeing your fair lady so soon? or why should you think that Monsieur de Castelneau has not sent for her?”

“Because he pledged himself not to do so,” replied Ernest de Nogent — “because he vowed that he would sooner go to the Bastille. Oh, no, no, my dear aunt! You do not understand: I must fly to him directly.”

“Better fly to the police, my dear nephew,” said the duchess. “If you are quite sure that somebody has been practising a fraud on this young lady, the police is the best resource.”

“Alas, alas!” replied Ernest, “the police here are of no avail. It is the king, my dear aunt. It is the king who has been practising the fraud. What can the police do there?”



“ Little, little will they do, indeed !” replied the duchess, now comprehending the whole matter. “ Little will they do, though they ought to afford protection against his creatures as well as against all other evil doers. But fly to the Count de Castelneau : consult with him : I will speak with Monsieur de Choiseul ; and he will — I know he will — do all he can. No, Ernest, no ! he will not suffer the king to violate all human rights and decencies so long as he is minister, I am sure.”

“ I would fain not embarrass him with such a task as this must be, my dear aunt,” replied Ernest de Nogent. “ I will find these people soon, depend upon it ; and when I do, I will treat them in such a way as may make me need that protection, which he shall then give me if he will. No, it were better for him not to meddle with it at present, except in affording me any tidings he can obtain.”

“ His own dignity,” replied the duchess, “ must be consulted too, Ernest. This conduct has gone on too long. It has grieved him bitterly, most severely ; and, for my part, I would

much rather see him strip himself of all his honours and all his power, and sit down calmly here to the unmingled enjoyment of fine feelings and high tastes, than be the minister of the greatest kingdom in Europe, swaying the destinies of empires, and yet powerless either to restrain and guard against the shameless, the disgraceful depravity of the court in which he stands next to the king, or to guard the people of the realm from such indecent outrage. Yes, Ernest, yes, I would rather see him plain Stephen of Choiseul, surrounded by a few high and noble friends, than, on such conditions, prime minister of France, with all the statesmen of Europe bowing before him."

"I doubt you not in the least," my dear aunt," replied Ernest; "but in asking you not to take any notice of this affair at present, I am guided by selfish motives too. I fear that if the duke do interfere, the king may be led to pursue even more violent and unjustifiable measures. I see, now that I think more coolly, that the object contemplated at present must be to bring Mademoiselle de St. Morin to Paris

against the count's inclination. They will never certainly dare venture upon any thing else. Monsieur de Castelneau will, I know, send her back again at once ; but if we irritate the king, he may give a positive order that she is to remain in Paris. Tell my uncle, then, all that has happened, but tell him what I have said upon the subject : he will judge best how to act, both for the interests of all persons concerned and for his own honour. We may well rely upon his judgment."

"Indeed, indeed, we may," replied the duchess, "for where shall we find in Europe a judgment equal to his?"

Thus spoke the Duchess of Choiseul ; and though it may seem strange that such sentiments should exist in the bosom of a Frenchwoman of that age towards her husband, yet her words were but very, very faint symbols of the feelings which that high and devoted heart contained.

Without waiting for any farther discussion, Ernest de Nogent took leave of his aunt, and mounting his horse rode onward towards Paris

as fast as he could go, calculating, by the way, what would be the best course for the count to pursue—whether to hurry on from the capital towards Castelneau, in order to undeceive Annette, and send her back again to her calm home, or to allow her to come to Paris, and then bid her return immediately. But Ernest de Nogent himself was calculating, as we have already seen, upon false premises. He knew not to what a daring extent the vices of Louis had carried him since he himself had quitted the post which he once held at the palace, or he would have seen, from the first moment, that it was most necessary to keep Annette afar from the immediate influence of the court. Not that he ever doubted for one moment what would be the conduct of Annette herself under any circumstances in which she might be placed; but, had he known all, he would have known that she might be subjected to all that is revolting, painful, and grievous to a pure heart—she might be forced to mingle with scenes which were in themselves pollution, and hear words which are a disgrace to utter or to listen to.

The state of the royal power in France at that moment presented a very curious phenomenon. In the heart of the court despotism was almost complete. The king's will was law to those who immediately surrounded him : there was nothing so arbitrary, so rash, or so violent, that he dared not do within a certain distance of the capital. Paris, in fact, was France : the adjacent provinces were mere dependencies, and the farther provinces only remote colonies, where the royal authority was but faintly felt. So much, indeed, had this become the case, that when an offending nobleman was ordered to absent himself fifty miles from Paris, it was called being sent into exile, and in common parlance no distinction was made between exile from the court and exile from the country.

In a remote province those acts of personal tyranny dared not be done which were daily enacted in the capital ; and if ever the monarch was tempted to stretch the arm of despotic power to grasp some object at a distance from Paris, the ministers of his pleasure were forced

to have recourse to artifice as well as violence, in order to bring the victim within the immediate vortex of the court. Nor did artifice and violence always succeed; for it is well known that Choiseul himself, in the early part of his career, suddenly removed from the court one of his own relations to guard her from pollution, and having placed a wide space between her and the king, set his despotic power at defiance. That, however, was at a time when the passions of Louis were under some restraint from a remaining sense of propriety: but within the last few years of his reign, since the period when Ernest de Nogent had quitted the royal household to serve in the field, all ties of morality, religion, and even decency, had been cast away; and it was very wrongly that the young officer fancied Annette might be easily removed even after she had arrived in Paris.

He was revolving all these matters in his mind as he rode along, but not suffering his thoughts to delay him in his progress, when not far from Fromenteau, he was passed by another horseman, galloping at as rapid a pace

as himself. Ernest de Nogent took no notice, and did not draw his bridle; but the moment after they had crossed each other, he heard a voice exclaim, "Monsieur de Nogent, Monsieur de Nogent."

Ernest checked his horse unwillingly, and looked round to see who it was that called; when, with a feeling of satisfaction, he beheld the face of one from whom he hoped to obtain some information, if not some assistance. He accordingly turned his horse completely, and rode up to the side of the other cavalier, who had only halted as if to say something to him at a distance.

"Good morrow, Monsieur Morin," said the young gentleman: "did you wish to speak with me?"

"Merely to ask whither away so fast, Monsieur de Nogent," replied Pierre Morin. "I think I may want to speak with you before the day be over, and I wish to know where you are to be found."

"Can you not tell me, Monsieur Morin, what you wish to say, now?" said Ernest.

"Where I shall be in the evening I cannot at all tell. My mind is troubled with business of some importance, and I think that perhaps you may know something of the matter."

"How should I know any thing of the matter?" said Pierre Morin, with a meaning smile.

"Because," replied Ernest, "you are said to know something of every one's actions, though men know not how you obtain such an insight."

"Very easily, indeed," replied Pierre Morin, who, be it remarked, was somewhat vain, and not altogether unreasonably so, of the skill with which he procured information. "It is scarcely possible, Monsieur de Nogent, for a man to be nearly twenty years the confidential agent and adviser of two lieutenants-general of police, and during nearly ten to exercise the principal power under them, without knowing something of every man and every family in France. Either they themselves come under our hands or their servants, or their friends, or their enemies, and whether it be themselves, or friends, or enemies, we always learn some-



thing; so that it needs but a good memory and a quick imagination to know a great deal, and to divine a great deal more."

"There are other ways, also, I suspect, Monsieur Morin," replied Ernest; "but pray if you do know any thing of the matter which now busies me, let me hear it, and give me your advice and assistance."

"There are other means, as you say," replied Pierre Morin. "Our good friends, the *mouchards*, give us some aid; but their information would be worth little or nothing unless it were well digested after it is received. However, you are right, in another respect. I think I do know something of the matter that troubles you, though probably less than you do; but I was just now going down to speak to the Duc de Choiseul upon the subject, and inquire what can be done with safety."

"You will not find the duke," said Ernest: "he is at Versailles."

"The duke quitted Versailles," replied Pierre Morin, looking at his watch, "at five minutes after one. His carriage is by this time just

rolling in through the gates of Chanteloup; and by the time I get there, he will have washed his hands in the little cabinet to the left of the picture gallery, he will have taken a glass of Madeira and a biscuit, and have talked five minutes with Madame de Choiseul, so that he will, just then, be writing a letter to Monsieur de Gontaut in Corsica. But for the matter in hand," he continued, more quickly; "that which affects you is news from Castelneau, is it not? Since you received the letter that alarmed you, I have made some inquiries, though not as many as I could wish. The man, Pierre Jean, has been employed because he is a bold villain, as well as a cunning one; but there have been more sent down since to second him: six, I understand, of the lowest and most detestable scum of the court. They have dared to take upon them the name of the police, and for that they shall be punished, whatever comes of it; but we must be quick in our motions, for by this time they are half way to Paris."

As Pierre Morin spoke, a dark and heavy cloud fell over the face of Ernest de Nogent,

and he gazed bitterly upon the ground, seeing that the danger was much greater than he had at first supposed, and revolving with agony of mind all the griefs, perils, and anxieties which might beset poor Annette. If it were the intention of the king, he thought, merely to bring Annette, in the first instance, to the house of her guardian in Paris, he would have contented himself with the forged summons which had been sent, and would not have despatched so numerous a body of men, assuming the name of police. His heart burnt within him ; and feelings at that moment took possession of his bosom which would have been termed treasonable by almost every man at the court of France.

“ Oh ! that this monster had been but a private man,” he thought, “ that with my own right hand I might have punished him as he deserves.”

Pierre Morin marked the expression of his countenance, and very easily divined his feelings.

“ Come, come, Monsieur de Nogent,” he

said, "do not give way ! Neither be rash nor despair. All will go well, depend upon it ; but we must manage this thing delicately : all will go well, I tell you, if we do not by some evil chance make a mistake in the game that we are playing. I will proceed to Chanteloup ; you go back to Paris ; but neither you nor the count must think of taking one step till you see me. I will join you soon, and give you information, for I am not a little interested in this matter as well as yourself. — But stay," he added, after a moment, "stay. I had forgotten ; you must neither mention to the count that you have seen me, nor let him know that I take any part in the affair. Do not utter my name either to him or to any one else, remember ; for in all things I must act but officially, or we shall spoil the whole business. There is nobody shall take the name of the police in France unpunished without due authority, and in chastising those who have done so, we may well set the lady free. Mention, then, not my name to any one ; but in two hours and a half meet me at the hotel of Clermont Ferrand, and I will tell you

more — but, mind, on no account must you commit me.”

Thus saying, he turned his horse again, and rode on ; and Ernest de Nogent pursued his way, thinking, “ It is strange what the habit of observation will do : this man has seen me but once with Annette, and yet he seems to have discovered at once how deeply I am interested in her, and all that concerns her. It is odd, too, Annette seemed to know him ; — and he declares he is interested in the affair as well as myself ! Yet what connection can there be between a person in his situation and one in hers ? He is evidently not a man of rank or birth — perhaps he may have been a tutor in her family.”

While Ernest thus thought and rode on upon his way, Pierre Morin, mounted on a strong and exceedingly swift horse, lost no time in reaching Chanteloup. Of the persons whom he found in the court-yard, some were employed in unharnessing four splendid horses from the carriage of the duke, some gazing idly at what the others were doing, but all bowed low and

humbly before the deputy of the lieutenant of police, and hastened to give him an answer to his inquiries. Pierre Morin found that his nice calculation of the prime minister's movements had been a little erroneous; the roads between Chanteloup and Versailles had been heavy. The carriage of the duke had been delayed for a few minutes by some other obstruction; and the consequence was, that the letter to Corsica had not been yet begun, and the biscuit, glass of Madeira, and conversation with the duchess were not yet concluded. Indeed, that conversation had lasted longer than it usually did, for Madame de Choiseul had, as we have seen, matters to relate which detained her husband from his other affairs.

It was announced to the duke, while still listening to his wife's narrative, that Monsieur Morin waited to see him, and he answered, "Take him into my cabinet. I will be with him in a moment. On my life, dear Louise," he said, "it would not surprise me if Morin had come about this very business; for he told me last night that the man, Pierre Jean, who

sticks like a bur to the skirts of the court, at once mean, unsightly, and injurious, had set out from Paris some time ago on a mission which he believed to be not of the very best description. I will speak with him at once, and let you know what he says. I am sick to the death at all this infamy, and I see that worse is coming still."

Thus saying, he quitted the duchess and proceeded to the cabinet where Pierre Morin was waiting. The agent of police bowed down to the ground before the prime minister, and the minister welcomed him with a gracious inclination, pointing to a seat, and bidding him sit down, without any assumption of state and dignity, such as the Duc de Choiseul might very likely have displayed in dealing with a man of less worth but higher rank: for the character of Pierre Morin was well known to him, and he was aware that such truth and honesty as his were seldom found combined with so much skill, shrewdness, and knowledge of human nature.

"Well, my good friend," he said, "what

brings you to Chanteloup to-day? I trust that nothing new has gone amiss."

"That, my lord, you must decide," replied Pierre Morin: "I come to you for information in regard to what has really taken place, and I hope we shall find that it is not amiss."

"Perhaps I may divine the nature of your errand, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke; "but I would fain hear, in the first instance, what it is, from your own mouth."

"It were best so to do, my lord," replied the officer; "and if I might take a great liberty, I would ask that you answer my questions without going farther than the mere matter of them, and without showing me any of your own views; for we may both be called upon hereafter to give an account of what we say upon this subject; and as neither you nor I will tell a lie, we may as well have the truth convenient."

"Well, well," said the duke; "propose your questions, Monsieur Morin: you are accustomed to interrogatories; and I thank you for your hint. The rest I will judge of as we proceed."



Pierre Morin then went on to detail, very briefly, but with a more accurate knowledge than any other man in the whole kingdom possessed, except the actors in the transaction, the whole particulars of what had befallen Annette ; taking great care to avoid the slightest mention of the king's name, or to hint that any higher person could be engaged in the affair than those who had actually appeared on the scene.

When he concluded the detail, the duke demanded, without other comment, " Well, Monsieur Morin, who do you think is the instigator of this affair ? "

" Nay, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, " that I do not know ; and, to say the truth, I do not at present intend to inquire ; but —— "

" Right, right ! " answered the duke, after a moment's thought : " I understand you — you are right — there is but that one way ! Go on with your questions. "

" Well, then, my lord," continued Pierre Morin, " you see, here is a flagrant breach of the law committed ; and, moreover, an insult of

the grossest kind offered to the police — unless your lordship or some of the ministers authorised these men to make this arrest, and to call themselves by a false name. May I ask if you did so?”

“Certainly not,” replied the duke, with a smile; “and I can at once answer that none of the ministers gave such authority, which is contrary to every principle of law and justice. — We should merit, and doubtless incur, the most severe indignation of the king were we to countenance such things.”

“Very well then, my lord,” replied Pierre Morin, “my course is very clear. I have already informed the lieutenant-general, my chief, that certain persons of bad repute have been passing themselves off for his agents, and making arrests as if under his authority; and he immediately gave me orders for apprehending them; but I thought it best to make sure that the matter had not taken place under lawful authority. As I now find,” he continued, with marked emphasis, “that your lordship and all the ministers of the crown are ignorant of the

whole transaction, I shall at once lodge all the parties concerned in the Châtelet, putting them *au secret*, till such time as we can gain full information as to their designs."

"An excellent plan, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke: "an excellent plan. But what do you intend to do with the young lady?"

"On that I will take your lordship's advice," replied Pierre Morin. "It might be best to send her back at once into Quercy; but, poor thing, she has had a long and fatiguing journey already, and ——"

"You seem to take a great interest in her, Monsieur Morin," said the duke suddenly.

"I do, indeed, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "and so would your lordship, if you saw and knew her. She is as beautiful and sweet a creature as ever you beheld."

"And her name is very like your own, Monsieur Morin," answered the duke.

Pierre Morin made him a low bow, out of which it was impossible to extract any definite meaning, adding, at the same time, "Your lordship does me a great deal of honour; but I

am merely a simple *roturier*, and neither a noble nor a saint, as the two first syllables of her name imply. But still what would your lordship have me do with her?"

"Hark ye, Morin," said the duke, speaking in a low voice. "Send her back again at once, without a moment's delay. I would protect her to the best of my power here; but there are some things in which I am powerless."

"Only in small things, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "in great ones, none so powerful: for the king said yesterday to the Count de Lude, as they were walking under the orangery, that if all the other ministers were to oppose your opinion, and all the statesmen in Europe were to back them, he would take your judgment against theirs, and feel sure of success."

The duke looked pleased; but replied, with a meaning smile, "Why, Monsieur Morin, Monsieur Morin, how do you learn all the king's private conversation? You have not, surely, any of the gentlemen whom you term, your good friends the *mouchards*, near the royal person?"

“ We have them every where, my lord,” replied Pierre Morin, with a reverential bow — “ ay, and in all classes. It would be very disrespectful, indeed, to his majesty not to pay him the same attention we pay to the rest of his subjects. Besides, as we have few opportunities of asking his will, how should we know it upon slighter occasions, if we did not give heed to such casual indications of his pleasure? The truth, also, is, my lord, that the *bureau de police* is, in fact, the Temple of Fame which one of our poets has been writing about, and every one who has a little piece of information to dispose of, carries it thither direct.”

“ It is a strange system,” said the duke, musing — “ a strange system, indeed, Monsieur Morin; and I cannot think a good one.”

“ Neither you nor I framed it, my lord,” replied Pierre Morin. “ You found it as it is: it made me what I am. You must use it — I must follow it. Besides, it is like one of those powder-carts that I have seen following the army, on which the tired men sometimes jump

up to ride, neither the most convenient nor the safest conveyance, but yet better than none."

"Pray Heaven it do not explode, and blow us all to atoms!" said the duke.

"What will be, will be!" answered Pierre Morin, with a true French shrug of indifference; and adding, "As I find your lordship is not at all cognisant of those men's conduct, I will proceed against them in the usual course," he bowed low, and retired.

## CHAP. IX.

THE Hôtel de Clermont Ferrand, at the time we speak of, was vacant as a residence, at least for any thing else than rats and mice. The proprietor was a young man then absent with the army: the woman put in to keep the place in order, who was the widow of an old porter, was absent gossiping with her neighbours the greater part of the day, and slept at the house of her daughter, at some distance from that place. She vowed that it was impossible to rest there, on account of the long-tailed denizens whom we have mentioned, and who, according to her account, danced all night over her head rather in the measure of a gavot than of a minuet.

It was sometimes convenient for the agents of the police to have a place where they could meet with a suspicious friend, somewhat less

dangerous to their guest than the central bureau. To meet this contingency in his own case, Pierre Morin had communicated his views to the good lady, who made him a most reverential courtesy ; and, being assured of a certain piece of money and the protection of the police year by year, she gave her good friend a key of the mansion, and took care never to present herself upon inexpedient occasions.

About five o'clock on the day of Pierre Morin's visit to the Duke of Choiseul, Ernest de Nogent entered the court of the hotel we have mentioned, and applied himself in vain to various doors for admission. Not one of them either yielded to his hand or returned the slightest answer, except a low murmuring echo, which spoke of emptiness. He looked at his watch—he was exactly to his time ; and, though he was suffering under impatience — that disease which renders men more inconsiderate than probably any other — he did bethink himself that Pierre Morin might be kept by some other engagement a few minutes longer than the time he had appointed. He therefore



walked up and down the court, determined to wait the event; and in about ten minutes the figure of him he expected suddenly appeared under the archway. Ernest was advancing to speak to him; but another man suddenly came up, touched Monsieur Morin on the arm, and addressed him in a low tone, and with an important face.

Pierre Morin paused and listened, and then demanded, "Ha! When?"

"Two hours ago!" replied the man, who appeared by his dress to be either a writing or a drawing master. "I saw him myself as he came out."

"Which way did he take?" demanded Pierre Morin: "to his father's house, or to the south?"

"To neither," answered the stranger: "he went home first, to the lodging which he hired three months ago; but then he shaved and dressed himself, and getting into a *chaise de poste*, rolled away to Versailles."

"Ha!" said Pierre Morin: "then, my good friend, your business is to go after him. Tell

our friend the marquis to let me hear all that passes within the palace; but do you watch where he goes yourself, when he quits the king, and let me know something more at the grand bureau, by eight o'clock."

All this was said so low, that Ernest, who had taken a turn to the other side of the court as soon as he saw how busily Pierre Morin was engaged, heard not a word; and the disguised emissary of the police, as soon as he had received the above directions, glided quietly away, without making any reply.

No sooner was he gone, than Pierre Morin advanced to the young officer, saying, "I have now obtained all the information I wanted. The young lady is within twenty miles of Paris, and she shall be free before midnight. What says the Count de Castelneau to the contents of your letter?"

"I have not seen him," replied Ernest de Nogent; "for before I arrived — some ten minutes, the servant said — he had set out for Versailles, having been summoned thither by a special messenger from the king."

“ Ha !” said Pierre Morin, “ that is strange, too !—They would keep him out of the way. But what is to be done with the young lady ? that is the question — whether to bring her to Paris to his hotel at once, or to send her back to Castelneau.”

“ Oh, send her back, send her back !” exclaimed Ernest de Nogent. “ In Heaven’s name keep her not here, if you have any interest in her fate.”

“ I have, indeed, young gentleman,” replied Pierre Morin : “ more than you know of. But though I can set her free, it is impossible for me to guard her back again to Castelneau, as I could wish to do. I cannot be absent myself without distinct orders. I cannot spare more than two men to go such a distance, and only one of those can be of my own people, while the people who are pursuing her may be many, and certainly will be unscrupulous.”

“ Let me, then, undertake that part,” replied Ernest de Nogent. “ You set her free. Give me two men to help me — my own servant, myself, and a man I can hire, will make five —

and I will answer with my life she shall reach Castelnau in safety."

Pierre Morin smiled. "I fear it may be dangerous for you," he said, "in more ways than one; but, however, I must have an hour or two to decide, for I have other persons to consult. Such things as these cannot be done without counsel, and I have many things to think of and to do. It is now five of the clock, meet me at ten to-night, with the two men you speak of, in the grounds of the small château of Michy. Do you know it?"

"No, I do not," replied Ernest de Nogent, "but I will easily find it: where does it lie?"

"Between Longueville and Malesherbes," replied Pierre Morin: "make for Longueville in the first place, then ride on straight before you as if you were going to Puiset, and take the first turning to your right. On your left you will find a gate — it is the first gate you come to. Go in there, and a little farther on, you will see the château. Do not go near it, however, but keep amongst the trees to the left. Take no notice of any thing you see or

hear till I come, for people may be passing up and down the road. Draw your horses amongst the trees, and keep them as much screened as possible."

"Oh, I will manage all that," replied Ernest de Nogent; "I am a soldier, you know, and accustomed to such things. You will join me there then; but how can we convey Mademoiselle de St. Morin back?"

"I will bring a carriage with me," replied the commissary, "only you be punctual to your hour, and careful in your movements. These are matters in which slight mistakes ruin great enterprises."

"Trusting to you entirely," replied Ernest de Nogent, "I will follow your directions to the letter; but we must all make haste, if you have other persons to see in Paris; for our time is very short, and the way long, I think."

"Oh, no," replied the commissary, "'tis not seven leagues. Quick horses and willing minds, and we shall accomplish the matter easily."

Ernest asked him to repeat once more the

directions he had given, and then left him to make hasty preparations for his journey. Those preparations, however, required consideration; for he had, in the first place, to engage some one to assist him; and, in the next place, he had to communicate by letter to the Count de Castelneau both what had occurred and the course he was about to pursue. When he came to perform the latter part of the task, he found it much more difficult to execute than he had anticipated; for in the eagerness which he had felt for the deliverance of her he loved, he had totally forgotten to ask himself what title he had to interfere in the matter. He now recollected, however, that that title might be questioned by others, and something told him that it might even be questioned by the Count de Castelneau himself; so that it was with some embarrassment, and after considerable thought, that he at length accomplished the undertaking.

He told the count then that the letter from his father, which he enclosed, had reached him at Chanteloup, and that his absence from Paris

at the time of its arrival had unfortunately prevented him from communicating it, before the count's departure for Versailles. He then went on to say, he had received information from good authority, that after having been induced to set out from Castelneau by a spurious letter, Mademoiselle de St. Morin had been subjected to a false arrest, and was even then detained in the neighbourhood of Paris. Under these circumstances, he added — avoiding all mention either of Pierre Morin's part in the affair, or of his own suspicions regarding the king — that he had determined to endeavour to liberate Mademoiselle de St. Morin at once, and would immediately communicate the result to Monsieur de Castelneau. He apologised for acting in the matter upon his own responsibility; but said, that he had many reasons, which the count could well conceive, for seeking to free Mademoiselle de St. Morin with the least possible delay.

This task being accomplished, and the letter having been left at the house of the count, Ernest next proceeded to insure the assistance

of an old soldier, who had formerly served in his own regiment. Horses also were to be hired; but being thoroughly acquainted with the city of Paris, and being himself well known and respected, that part of the undertaking was easily effected, and by half past seven o'clock, he was in the saddle and on the road to Longueville. He passed through that little village after a quick ride in a dark night, at about a quarter before ten, and then proceeding somewhat more slowly, he followed exactly the directions of Pierre Morin, watching all the turnings narrowly as they had been described to him. The way, indeed, seemed much longer than he had been told it was; and he was beginning to fancy that he must have made a mistake, when by the very faint light that still existed in the air he perceived a gate upon the left hand, which opened easily to his hand. He accordingly went in, followed by his two attendants, and closing the entrance carefully behind him, advanced up an avenue of trees which apparently led towards the château he was seeking.



The night, as I have said, was extremely dark; and Ernest de Nogent for some time looked for the mansion in vain. In the end, however, he perceived the dark lines of a building at some distance on the road, and, to the left, as Pierre Morin had described, some scattered groups of trees at the distance of about a hundred yards from the avenue. As soon as he had satisfied himself that this was the spot which the deputy of the lieutenant-general had meant, he quitted the road, and proceeded to shelter himself under the trees; in doing which, his horse took fright at a roe-deer, which started from the bushes, and rearing violently, had nearly fallen back with him. Ernest de Nogent, however, who was a bold and practised horseman, forced the animal forward amongst the trees, and then dismounting, quieted and pacified him to prevent the fretful passaging into which the struggle had thrown it.

Before this was fully accomplished, he heard the sound of other horses' feet coming up the avenue, and in a minute or two after, as he gazed intently forward, he saw distinctly three

or four dark forms ride rapidly along the road. The murmur of voices too was heard ; and just as they reached the nearest point to himself, one of the speakers raised his tone, saying, with a short, peculiar, and disagreeable laugh, “ We will soon see — They have taken care of the gate, I hope.”

Ernest said not a word, and his heart beat a good deal — but it was with anger, not with fear, and he gazed steadily towards the building which was before his eyes for several minutes. As the shadow was there darker, he could just faintly distinguish several horsemen pause and dismount ; but a moment after, a large door in the centre of the building opened, and from the bright light which issued forth he perceived clearly, that the suspicions which the tone of the voice and the peculiar laugh he had heard induced him to entertain, were not without foundation, for in the graceful though somewhat spare form that first entered the château, he instantly recognised the person of the Baron de Cajare.

## CHAP. X.

WE must now quit the cool outer air for a short time, and enter into an abode of revelry and merriment, within which, ever since darkness had set in, a party of five men and three women had been eating and drinking, and laughing and singing, and holding a conversation which, though the language and the absolute terms might be something more refined than they would have been in a *cabaret* of the common people, was in substance and meaning of a more gross, disgusting, and degrading kind than might have been expected, in any ordinary circumstances, in the poorest *auberge* in France.

Those members of the lower orders that ape the vices of the higher classes are sure to become even more disgustingly depraved than when they remain satisfied with the coarser vices more common in their own rank. The

men and women here assembled were the lowest grade of the vicious followers of a vicious court; and there was mixed with the libertine slang, which they had acquired in their base services to those above them, a vulgarity which left their profligacy naked in its most horrible form. There was, withal, a merriment, too, and a levity, and an affectation of wit and smartness, which rendered the caricature of that abandoned court complete.

But it is forbidden to me in these pages to draw the minute traits of a picture so revolting; and contenting myself with this general description, I must leave the whole preceding part of the conversation that was there going on unsaid, up to the moment when one of the party, with a foaming glass of rich wine in his hand, and a licentious jest upon his lips, suddenly started, and set down the glass, exclaiming, "*Ventre Saint Gris!* There are horses' feet. It cannot be the king at this hour."

"The king!" cried another. "Sot! Animal! Don't you know that the king never

rides now-a-days, except when he is hunting? No, no, it is some of those *faquins* of the court. Go you, Merliton, and see. There, they are ringing the bell like fury. Quick, quick! get them into another room, and put those two bottles away. Monsieur Albert would haul us over the coals, if he found us drinking his Epernay."

Great bustle and confusion now took place in the room, while the man they called Merliton — which was evidently a *nom de guerre* — proceeded slowly to open the door, with eyes somewhat inflamed with the debauch, though his step was steady, and his mind was still clear. The moment the entrance was free, a gentleman, carrying a cane in his hand, walked coolly in, and was taking his way along the passage of the house without pausing or asking any questions.

Merliton, however, threw himself suddenly in his way, exclaiming, "Who the devil are you, and what do you want? This is no place for such cool gentry to march in, as if they were at home. Yes, sir," he continued, as the

other gazed at him from head to foot with a contemptuous look — “yes, sir, it is I, your very obedient humble servant; but, indeed, sweet sir, you have the advantage of me! Pray, who are you?”

“Be so good as to move out of my way,” said the Baron de Cajare, coolly, but appearing to be animated with the purpose of raising the cane, which he carried in his hand, and applying it to the shoulders of Master Merliton.

At that moment, however, a personage with one eye, to whom the reader has been already introduced, passed the stranger suddenly, exclaiming, “Merliton, thou art drunk: drunk as was thy mother at the moment of thy birth. She was canteen woman, monsieur le baron,” he continued, addressing Monsieur de Cajare — “she was canteen woman to the thirteenth regiment, and assured me upon her honour — and a woman of honour she was — that, to the best of her recollection, she had never been one whole day sober for forty years. So, my good friend Merliton, here, must have been born when she was drunk. You see he does not dis-

grace his parentage. Now, Merliton, get out of the way, there's a good fellow, or I shall be obliged to let the light through you, and a man with a key-hole in him is not so good as a door."

At these words Merliton drew somewhat back, and the baron passed on, saying to Pierre Jean, who had accompanied him, "This may be very amusing, but it does not please me. Show me into some room, and send me somebody whom this young lady has not yet seen amongst these men."

The baron was accordingly taken to a vacant chamber, and a light was speedily brought; but it was more difficult a great deal to find a person who had not been seen by Mademoiselle de St. Morin, for every one of the party in the house had contrived to visit her apartment in turn, not a little to her annoyance and grief. As soon as it was ascertained that such was the case, the baron ordered one of the men who had accompanied him, and who had remained without, with two other attendants, in charge of the horses, to be brought in; and,

followed by him, he proceeded up stairs to the apartment in which, as he was told, Annette was to be found ; the key being given to him at the foot of the stairs, for she had been held as a close prisoner, together with her own servants, since she had arrived from Castelneau. The apartment in which she was confined contained four chambers : the first of which was an anteroom, where the two men servants were now seated. They both started up on the entrance of the baron, with looks which indicated a strong resolution to resist any further insolence towards their mistress to the best of their power, however small that power might be. The moment, however, that they beheld the Baron de Cajare, whom they had frequently seen at Castelneau, their faces brightened ; for any countenance but those which had lately presented themselves seemed to them that of a friend.

The baron instantly caught the change of expression, and understood what it meant : he accordingly held up his hand with a meaning look, as if to caution them against making any



noise, inquiring, at the same time, in a low voice, "Where is your mistress?"

"Here, sir, here," said the old servant Jerome: "she will be so glad to see you, I am sure. She is in this room with Madame Donnine and her maid."

Thus saying, the old man led the way and opened the door, and the baron followed with a quiet step, taking his tone from what had just passed.

As soon as she saw him, Annette rose ; but it was with very different feelings from those which Jerome had imagined she would entertain. For a moment Annette did not feel quite sure that he himself was not the contriver of the whole scheme under which she had suffered, and, consequently, her first sensations tended towards indignation rather than pleasure. Various circumstances, however, presenting themselves rapidly to her mind, made her judge more favourably the next moment, and believe that the Baron de Cajare had no immediate share in the transactions of the last few

days ; so that her look of anger and dismay speedily underwent a change.

On his part, the baron, skilful in reading the human countenance, marked the first expression which appeared upon hers ; and bowing low but distantly, he said, “ I have come, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, perhaps too presumptuously, considering all things, to free you from the hands of the insolent villains who have got possession of you, and to convey you to a place of safety ; if you will so far pardon me as to accept of my aid.”

Poor Annette knew but too little of the world, and the tone in which he spoke tended still more to remove her apprehensions. She thought she had done him injustice, and replied, mildly and gratefully, “ Indeed, Monsieur de Cajare, I feel infinitely obliged, and can of course regard such an act of kindness as no presumption. — Oh ! far, far from it,” she exclaimed, clasping her hands, as all the painful particulars of her situation came back more forcibly on her mind. “ How shall I ever be able to show myself grateful enough to any one

that will free me from these people, who are not — who cannot be, I am sure — the police of the realm !”

“ The police !” exclaimed the Baron de Cajare, very well satisfied with the progress he had already made ; “ they may be the object of the good offices of the police ere long, but otherwise they have nothing more to do with the police than the man who was executed in the Grève a few days ago. Their object in regard to yourself will be explained hereafter ; the only thing to be done now is to set you free.”

“ Oh ! let us go ! let us go immediately !” replied Annette, taking a step towards the door.

“ Nay, nay,” said the baron, with a smile, “ we must pause a little yet. A carriage will be here directly, to bear you to a place of security at once ; and in the mean time, as I have reason to believe that some of these villains are still lingering about in the ground, I must go and dislodge them with my servants, that we may meet with no obstruction.”

“ But where are you going to take me to, Monsieur de Cajare ?” said Annette. “ Of course,

I had better go at once to Monsieur de Castelleau."

"He was at Versailles when I quitted it," replied the Baron de Cajare, "and thither do I propose to take you, Mademoiselle. You may rely on my honour, I think, and be quite sure that I will place you in perfect security."

Annette would have fain had a more definite explanation; and the vagueness of the baron's words renewed, whether she would or not, her former apprehensions. She resolved not to show any fears, however; for she felt that her situation could not well be worse than what it was, and she therefore only added, "Pray let us go quickly, Monsieur de Cajare! Every moment that I stay in this place is terrible to me."

"I will but insure that these people have quitted the park," replied the baron, "and return to you without loss of time."

As he spoke he gazed upon the sweet girl whom he addressed with a look of admiration and tenderness which he could not repress. He took care, indeed, that it should not be disrespectful, but it revived, in a considerable

degree, Annette's fears and apprehensions in regard to his object, and made her think with dislike of incurring a great debt of obligation towards a man for whom she had learnt to entertain a strong antipathy.

After leaving her, the baron paused in the corridor musing for a moment, while his servant held the lamp, and ending his reverie with a few unuttered words which even the man close to him did not hear distinctly.

"It will be a difficult game," he said to himself; "but it must be played!"

As those words were never fully explained by him to any one, and as his actions did not afterwards afford the interpretation, we must draw back for a moment the curtain of the breast, and, looking into the heart, investigate what were the emotions passing within — what were the objects he proposed to himself — what were the purposes with which he came thither. It may easily be understood that the Baron de Cajare had not personally the power, if he had the inclination, of freeing Annette from the hands of those who now held her in a state of

unlawful captivity; and though, perhaps, to those who are well read in the annals of the reign of Louis XV., and know the base subserviency of that monarch's courtiers, the conduct of the baron might give reasonable cause for believing he was base enough to lend himself to the licentious views of the king, yet such was not exactly the case. He had, it is true, been suddenly freed from captivity, had been sent for to Versailles, and had held a long and confidential communication with the monarch on the very subject of Annette de St. Morin; for Louis and almost all the members of his court well knew that the good baron was in no degree scrupulous in any point where his own interests were concerned. He had strong passions, it was true; and sometimes, indeed, those passions had been known to get the better of his interested views: but he restrained them, in general, by the power of a cool and calculating mind; and the king believed that the taming which he had lately undergone in the Bastille must have brought down any spirit of resistance to the level which

was desired. The baron had listened, then, with the utmost complacency during his interview with the monarch, even assisted the king with an appropriate word every now and then, when Louis found a difficulty in explaining his own meaning; and showed not the slightest surprise, disgust, or indignation at proposals which were an insult to him, and a gross and horrible injustice towards Annette. But all the time that the conversation was proceeding, the baron was calculating in his own mind whether there might or might not be a possibility, not only of frustrating the king's designs, but also of making them serviceable to his own views and purposes in regard to Annette.

Strange to say, the Baron de Cajare really loved Annette; she was indeed the only being he had ever loved; but her beauty and her grace had commenced what difficulties, and opposition, and coldness had finished. As but too often happens, those very feelings of repugnance towards him on her part, which should have checked his pursuit, had only urged him

forward the more vehemently; and he resolved, even while the king spoke, to risk all that even the anger and indignation of a despotic monarch can effect, to obtain possession of her he loved. The king, in the course of their interview, had instructed him to bring Annette to Versailles, making a show of delivering her from the hands of those who had brought her from the south; and the baron calculated that an opportunity would be thus afforded him of laying before the fair object of such machinations the alternative of remaining in the power of a licentious monarch armed with despotic authority, or of uniting her fate with his, and quitting the court of France altogether.

Difficulties, indeed, he knew, might interpose; but such difficulties had been overcome in other instances, by art if not by force, and he doubted not in the least that Annette's choice would soon be made, if she once became fully aware of the dangers of her situation. He had determined, therefore, to obey the king's orders to the letter, to a certain extent, to take Annette to Versailles, and at the mo-



ment that she became fully aware of all the horrors that surrounded her, to present to her the means of escape by uniting her fate with his. He had, however, another task in hand, which he now hastened to perform.

Alas for human plans ! In the very first instance, after the momentary pause of thought which we have mentioned, the Baron de Cajare accidentally destroyed the very last vestige of that confidence in his kindness of purpose, which his manner and tone had at first revived, for a moment, in Annette's bosom. After he left her, the young lady remained standing in the middle of the room, thinking silently over what had just passed, and her meditation lasted longer than his, for his was only produced by a momentary apprehension lest his skill and cunning should not be sufficient to outwit the king, whilst hers had for its object all the dangers, difficulties, and anxieties that surrounded her. She was roused, however, two or three minutes after, by hearing a voice, which she well recognised as his, exclaiming, in

a loud and impatient tone, "Pierre Jean, Pierre Jean ! where have you got to now ?"

At once every thing like trust or hope vanished from her bosom in an instant. "He is a confederate, then," she thought, "with the chief instrument of those who have deceived and betrayed me." The next question which she put to her own heart naturally was, "Is he not himself the instigator of all that has taken place ? Is he not himself now trying to deceive me with a hope of escape, while he is the person who has brought me into this situation ?" The disappointment of hope and expectation, the bewilderment of discovering so much baseness and treachery, the despair of finding any one to deliver her, overcame the courage and strength of mind which had hitherto supported her ; and, sitting down at the table where good Donnine had remained watching the countenance of her mistress, Annette covered her eyes with her hands, and wept bitterly.

## CHAP. XI.

WHILE this was passing within the little château of Michy — a place which had been privately bought by Louis the Fifteenth, with views and purposes of the most disgraceful kind — Ernest de Nogent had remained amongst the trees, as he had been directed by Pierre Morin, though the sight of the Baron de Cajare had tempted him, almost beyond his power of resistance, to enter the château, and endeavour at once to set Annette at liberty. He had but two men with him, however; the baron had evidently been accompanied by three; and, from the words which had fallen from the deputy of the lieutenant of police, he had every reason to believe that there were many more within the château itself. He paused, then, and watched, not knowing what was to take place next, and determined, at all risks, to

interfere if any attempt were made to remove Annette before the arrival of Pierre Morin. After waiting some time, anxiously listening for every sound, he began to suspect that the Baron de Cajare had caused the gates to be closed after him, and that the police might be delayed by that obstacle. Under this impression, he directed one of those who had accompanied him to return on foot to the gate, and, if he found it locked, to do what he could to open it.

The man had not been gone five minutes, however, when some one bearing a torch was seen to issue forth from the château; another succeeded, and then another; till at length six or seven flambeaux appeared before the house, and began to move about in different directions through the small space of open ground called the park. The enclosure did not, indeed, contain more than fifty or sixty acres, so that no one could lie concealed for any great length of time; but there were apparently numerous groups of trees and thick bushes, and those amongst which the young officer was now standing afforded an irregular screen, which, by

a step taken hither or thither, might be made to hide his party from the eyes of any one who did not actually enter the thicket.

The horses he had placed in a spot where they could not be seen, 'as soon as he had become as much acquainted with the ground as the darkness would permit; and though he doubted not that the rearing and plunging of his charger, when scared by the roe-deer, had attracted the attention of the Baron de Cajare, yet he hoped to conceal himself where he was, till the arrival of the police. He was now not a little apprehensive, however, lest the man whom he had sent to the gate might be intercepted on his return; and he listened eagerly for any sound, while the torches wandered over the ground in parties of two or three, evidently in search of somebody or something.

Circling round him at a distance, the blaze of light was seen wavering here and there through the darkness of the night; now flashing broad and red upon the ground, now appearing and disappearing through the trees. At length Ernest's quick ear caught the sound of a step ap-

proaching; but at that moment one of the torch-bearers was seen to rush forward and throw his torch down upon the grass, calling loudly, "Here is one of them! Here is one of them! Follow quick, follow quick!" Several others instantly rushed forward, and at the same moment the servant whom he had sent to the gate, ran up to the side of Ernest de Nogent, while the other party came on, chasing him rapidly.

There were two or three stout trees in front, with but small spaces between them, while to the right and left was the thicket; and finding that he must now absolutely stand upon his defence, Ernest took advantage of the situation, with the prompt decision of an experienced soldier.

"Draw your swords!" he exclaimed. "Between those two trees, Martin!" Guard that open space on your left. I will take care of your right. Here, Pierrot! Come in here. Now, spare no man, for they are doing what is not lawful."

Almost as he spoke the Baron de Cajare,

with four others, amongst whom was Pierre Jean himself, some bearing torches and some without, came so close that the faces of the one party became visible to the other.

“Down with your arms, and surrender,” shouted the Baron de Cajare. “What do you here at this hour of night?”

“I ask you the same question, sir,” replied Ernest de Nogent. “Stand off,” he continued, “stand off, I say, or you are a dead man.”

The baron, nevertheless, advanced with his drawn sword held lightly in his hand, as if he did not expect that Ernest de Nogent would attempt any serious resistance; and the young gentleman did, indeed, feel a disinclination to injure a man who seemed not upon his guard. When he had taken two more steps forward, however, the Baron de Cajare threw himself in an instant into an attitude of attack; and, well knowing that protection would be afforded him for any thing he might do, lunged fiercely at the bosom of his opponent. Fortunately, Ernest de Nogent had not been entirely thrown off his guard: the baron’s foot slipped a little

on the dewy turf, and the young officer, parrying his lunge in tierce, took advantage of that circumstance to get within his adversary's point, and then, drawing up his left foot, he struck him a violent blow with the hilt of his sword upon the face, exclaiming, in the indignation of his heart, "Traitor and scoundrel!"

The violence of the blow overthrew the balance of his adversary, and the baron fell back bleeding profusely from a bruised gash under his eye. He started on his feet again in a moment, however, recovered his guard as quickly as possible, and, exclaiming in a much cooler tone than might have been expected, "Hold the torches, hold the torches!" recommenced his attack upon the young officer with cold and bitter determination.

He was a complete master of his weapon, and was now aware of the slippery nature of the ground. His opponent, indeed, was scarcely inferior to him in skill, and was a taller and more powerful man; but his two servants were attacked on either side at the same moment, and others of the torch-bearers were seen hur-



rying up from the various parts of the ground over which they had been scattered, as if to take Ernest's small party in the rear.

Pierre Jean, for his part, stood by calmly, holding the torch to give light to the scene of combat between the Baron de Cajare and Ernest de Nogent; and ever and anon when he saw a good pass exchanged, he put his left hand up under his hat, and, scratching his head, exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo!" in the tone of a connoisseur.

At length, however, he seemed to think that the baron was not making so much progress as could be wished; for he shifted the torch from his right to his left hand, put the right into his pocket, and drawing forth a pistol, demanded, in a deliberate tone, "Shall I shoot him, Monsieur?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the baron, angrily, "leave him to me! In three minutes I will kill him like a dog."

A sharp wound in the neck, however, at that moment, taught him that he must be careful lest he should be killed himself. But the sight

of the torches, now gathering closely round the clump of trees, and some of them even entering the thicket, made him feel fully confident that his enemy was altogether in his power. He continued the combat, indeed ; but it was with a dark and treacherous purpose, which would have crossed the minds of few men but himself at a moment of such fierce excitement. "When they are upon him from behind," he thought, "and he is embarrassed with them, I will lunge and kill him ;" and in pursuance of this plan, he kept his blade playing lightly round that of Ernest de Nogent, ready at any opportune moment to put his base design in execution.

That moment was almost come ; for a torch was seen struggling through the trees behind, casting its red glare upon the brown stalks and yellow leaves around, not ten yards from the spot where the combat was going on ; and with the fierce exultation of nearly gratified hatred, the baron was holding his breath, and scanning eagerly the form of his adversary, calculating where and how he would strike him, when suddenly, to his astonishment, Pierre Jean dropped

the lighted end of his torch towards the ground, as if his arm were paralysed, and, with a face turning deadly pale, looked sharply round over his left shoulder.

This curious effect was produced by a talismanic touch, and a few low-sounding words which Pierre Jean knew right well. The next moment the Baron de Cajare himself found a hand upon his shoulder, and "*De par le roi*" once more sounded in his ear. Turning fiercely round, he beheld the fine countenance of Pierre Morin bent sternly upon him, and, in rage at his disappointment, he had well nigh plunged his sword into the breast of the commissary; but Morin, without any weapon, still held his grasp, saying, "Monsieur de Cajare, you are my prisoner! Surrender your sword."

"Sir, you are making a mistake," exclaimed the baron furiously; "and this time your insolence shall not go unpunished."

"I am making no mistake, Monsieur le Baron," replied Pierre Morin; "nor am I using any insolence. Heaven forbid that I should, to a gentleman of your condition."

“But the king, sir,” exclaimed the baron: “the king has ——”

“Given you no authority to do what you have been doing,” replied Pierre Morin. “In one word, sir, I know you have seen the king. I know what directions were given you; and if you will take my advice, you will not compromise his majesty’s name in any manner, but will refrain from divulging secrets with which he may have condescended to trust you. Take him away, Monsieur Joachim, his abode is to be now the Châtelet. Suffer him to speak with no one till I have received his deposition myself, and prevent him from saying any thing that may be disagreeable to the king. Paul, see that none of these other people escape. Are there enough men on the other side of the copse?—Master Pierre Jean, I think we shall hang you now. I told you the last time that you would not be satisfied till you had eaten the rope.—Monsieur de Cajare, you had better go quietly, or you must have your wrists decorated with ruffles that gentlemen do not like.—Now, sir, who are you?” he continued, advancing to-

wards Ernest de Nogent, as if he had never seen him before ; but then, approaching a little nearer, he proceeded, “ Ah ! Monsieur de Nogent, is it you ? I suppose you have come here to inquire after Mademoiselle de St. Morin. — She is to be conducted to Versailles.”

These words were pronounced aloud, and they had a strange effect upon both the parties who heard them. The Baron de Cajare, who had not yet ceased to resist the efforts made to draw him from the scene, became for the first time fully convinced that Pierre Morin had really received orders from the king ; and, cursing the treachery and fickleness of absolute monarchs, he submitted, and was led away. The heart of Ernest de Nogent fell at such tidings, and he gazed for a moment in agony upon the calm unchanging countenance of the commissary.

Pierre Morin, however, advanced towards the point where several torches were still seen in the thicket, and in doing so he passed close by the spot where Ernest stood, stupified and horror-struck. Morin neither turned his head

nor looked towards him; but, as he passed, the young officer heard a low voice say, "Not a word ! and do not be alarmed."

Ernest, however, could not help feeling many an apprehension in regard to the situation of his sweet Annette; but at that moment one of the exempts demanded of his leader, "What are we to do with this gentleman, Monsieur le Commissaire? We have no orders."

"Nor I either," replied Pierre Morin; "you must let him alone. He has had nothing to do with the affair of counterfeiting the police. You will only arrest those whose names you have on the list, especially Pierre Jean, great Merliton and little Merliton, and the rest, with the three servants of Monsieur de Cajare. But there seem to me so many of these gentry that you had better call up the archers from the gate, and let the others keep all round this spot till they come. We have got them in a net, and must take care not to let them out."

"Oh, we have plenty of men, sir, we have plenty without the archers," said the man called Paul.

“ Ay, but I must have five or six with me to search the house,” replied Pierre Morin. “ I cannot wait here all night till you have got these fellows out of the thicket. I have that case of poisoning in the Marais to investigate, and the man who committed forgery to interrogate, before I go to bed to-night. The lieutenant-general is ill, you know; so it all falls upon me.”

A messenger ran off immediately to bring the rest of the police from the gate; and in the mean while Ernest de Nogent, bethinking himself of the situation of the two men who had accompanied him thither, addressed the commissary, saying, “ These two are my servants, Monsieur Morin: I hope that they are not to be detained.”

“ Oh no, oh no,” replied Pierre Morin; “ let them pass—or, stay, you three had better come with me to the house, and then there will be no mistake. I know that I can depend upon you, Monsieur de Nogent, for assistance in case of need. There may be half a dozen more of these scoundrels up at the château, for aught I know.”

"I will go with you willingly," replied Ernest, in a tone that left no doubt of his zeal.

But Pierre Morin still waited till he had seen all the archers arrive from the gate; and then choosing out two of the exempts to accompany him, he walked slowly on with Ernest de Nogent and the rest towards the château, stopping and looking round him into the darkness from time to time, as if to see that there was no one lingering about.

"There is something shadowy down there," he said to one of the men, pointing with his hand; "run down and see what it is. We should be better of a torch," he added to another. "Go back and bring that one that is burning on the ground.—Do not be afraid!" he whispered in a low voice to Ernest de Nogent, while the two exempts were gone; and after waiting a minute for their return, Ernest thought he heard the sound of distant carriage wheels.

"I wonder who that can be travelling so late at night?" said Pierre Morin aloud, leading the way on towards the château. "We com-



missaries of the police, you know, Monsieur de Nogent, love to know the meaning of every thing we hear or see." He paused for a minute or two — then advanced again — then paused once more, and seemed to listen, saying to the exempt who came up at that moment, "Do you not hear the wheels of a carriage?"

"I did a minute ago, sir," replied the exempt; "but it is gone now. Shall I send back and see?"

"No," replied Pierre Morin, "that were useless. If it be gone so far, before you could mount and be after it, all trace would be gone. I shall hear to-morrow; for Michael Brun and Angelo are on the road, and they will give us information."

Thus saying he again walked forward, and in another moment or two they stood in the Ionic portico which we have mentioned, where they found another exempt waiting. Pierre Morin held up his hand, as if to enjoin silence; and then, cautiously lifting the great heavy latch which in those days was attached to almost all the châteaux of France, he opened the door

without difficulty, and entered at once. A loud ringing laugh was the first thing that met their ears; then gay and somewhat licentious words; then other signs of merriment; then a health drank and responded to; and then a light and ribald song. Pierre Morin paused and listened, motioning those who accompanied him to keep back. At the end of the first verse of the song, however, he whispered a word to one of the exempts, who took a pistol out of his pocket and advanced towards the door from whence the sounds proceeded. The persons who were busied in such merriment were either by this time so filled with wine, or so occupied with the bottle, that they attended not in the least to what was passing in the rest of the house; and the exempt was enabled to peep through the chink of the door, which was ajar, without being discovered. Returning to the side of Pierre Morin, he informed him that the persons within were two men and three or four women.

“Then you two stay here below,” replied Pierre Morin, beckoning the second exempt

up from the porch — “ You two stay here with one of Monsieur de Nogent’s servants. You need not come with me. Follow me, Monsieur de Nogent, with the other two men ; we must not want help in case of need, that would not do at all ; we cannot tell how many there are up stairs.”

He then whispered a word or two to the exempt whom he had first spoken to, and, having done so, led the way up the flight of steps by which, as we have seen, the Baron de Cajare reached the apartment where Annette was confined. Placing a man at each end of the corridor, Pierre Morin then proceeded to examine every room as he went on, so as to insure completely that nobody could escape ; and accompanied by Ernest de Nogent, whose heart beat with no slight apprehensions, he went on from chamber to chamber till he came to a door at the extreme end of the corridor, which stood open. This was the last door on that side ; and speaking aloud, he said, “ We must find some one here at all events ; the house cannot be empty.”

Empty, however, it proved; for in none of the apartments up stairs was Annette or any of her attendants to be found. From door to door, from room to room, once more Pierre Morin proceeded through the whole house, but it was in vain that he did so; it was in vain that, rousing the people below from their drunken revelry, he demanded again and again what had become of the young lady who had been brought there that morning: they either could not or would not give the slightest information concerning her; and Ernest de Nogent looked in his companion's face with dismay, apprehending a thousand things in a moment, for which there was little or no substantial cause.

For his part, Pierre Morin paused again at the bottom of the stairs, again ordered the château to be searched by all the exempts, again cross-questioned the men and women who had been found in the lower part of the house, and then caused all the courts and other detached parts of the building to be examined. But all his efforts proved equally useless, and in the end, consigning the whole party to the care of

his officers, he walked slowly back towards the spot where the encounter had taken place between Ernest de Nogent and the Baron de Cajare.

As they went, he seemed to entertain some apprehension that the men might be too much for the exempts, and he consequently sent Ernest's two servants to give them aid. As soon as the latter were gone, he said, in a low and significant voice, "Do not be afraid, Monsieur de Nogent; I doubt not that in this confusion the young lady has found an opportunity of making her escape. I am not at all sure that it would have been the best thing for her to go to Versailles, after all."

"The worst, the worst on earth!" cried Ernest.

"Well, then, we need not very much regret that she has got off," replied Pierre Morin. "However, the king will be very angry, and so you will be kind enough not to say that I said so."

Ernest promised to obey this warning; and

something in the tone of Pierre Morin induced him to ask, "Will you not tell me more?"

"Really I have nothing to tell," replied Pierre Morin, in a cool tone. "If you have any information to give, on your part, pray give it me, Monsieur de Nogent; for I can assure you that I fear the king's displeasure in this business very much."

He spoke so calmly and decidedly that Ernest was completely puzzled; but he still ventured to inquire, "Is there nothing that you can permit me to say to Monsieur de Castelleau which may relieve his mind from the anxiety that you know he must feel?"

"Nothing in the least, my dear young gentleman," replied Pierre Morin. "As I have said to yourself, I must say to him, that I have nothing to tell of any kind, only that I doubt not Mademoiselle de St. Morin has made her escape; and if so, the count will undoubtedly hear of her soon. However, for the present, I think it is quite as well that none of us should know any thing about the matter, for we shall all be questioned very strictly, no doubt; and,

for my part, I am glad that I can safely say I have done my best to find the young lady here, but without success."

Notwithstanding all these assurances, Ernest de Nogent could not divest his mind of the belief that the commissary knew more of the matter than he chose to avow. But as he saw that no further intelligence of any kind was to be obtained from him, he only asked, as they came up to the spot where the police were standing with their prisoners, "May I then consider myself at liberty, Monsieur Morin?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Pierre Morin; "I have to apologise for detaining you so long; but it was to assist me, not to restrain you, I can assure you, that I took the liberty of detaining you. Are these your horses? A fine animal that, sir."

Ernest was in no humour to discuss the merits of a horse; and therefore as soon as the other prisoners were brought up, and Pierre Morin intimated that he wanted no further assistance, the young gentleman mounted, and

pursued his way back towards Paris as fast as possible.

His horse knocked up before he reached the capital, however; and then being at a place where no other means of advance was to be procured, he was obliged to pause till morning, though certainly he slept not one moment during the weary hours of night that still remained. As soon as it was daylight, and his horse was refreshed, he remounted, and hastened on towards Paris, not quite certain that it would not be best to go on to Versailles; but as a visit to the house of the Count de Castelneau could not delay him for more than half an hour, even should that nobleman not have returned, he determined to turn aside and proceed to the hotel at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques, where he found every thing in such a state of perfect calmness and tranquillity as to form a strange contrast with the feelings of his own heart. On asking for the count, he was told that he was just up and about to go to breakfast; and, on entering, he found him



sitting at the table, reading somewhat eagerly a note which he held in his hand.

“Ah, Monsieur de Nogent!” he exclaimed, as soon as he beheld the young officer, “can you give me any explanation of what this means? Though apparently satisfactory, these words alarm me,” and at the same time he handed the paper to Ernest. It contained a few words written in a fair female hand, and was to the following effect:—

“My dear Father and Guardian, I am permitted to write these lines to assure you that I am quite well, safe, and free from all danger and apprehension. I do this lest other tidings should reach and alarm you, for I have escaped a great and terrible danger: greater, I believe, than I myself clearly comprehend even now. I trust you may return soon to Castelneau. Your Annette.”

## CHAP. XII.

It was in the palace at Versailles, and in the private cabinet of Louis the Fifteenth, that a party were assembled, comprising almost all the persons whom we have lately seen acting a prominent part in the course of this history. Those who were wanting, indeed, were certainly very important personages in the tale; and amongst them one of the most so was Pierre Morin himself. But, on the other hand, there were present the Duc de Choiseul, the Count de Castelneau, Ernest de Nogent, the Baron de Cajare, and Louis himself; and we shall have occasion to remark that, in the then existing circumstances, many of these characters acted in a very different manner from that in which we might have supposed they would act, judging by their conduct hitherto. This, however, was not unnatural; for men, in the ordinary inter-

course of life, generally feel more or less under restraint from some of the particular prejudices or the conventional rules of society; and it is only when strong passions throw down the barriers, or when negligence suffers small traits to appear, that we discover the true character of those with whom we mingle in the world.

On the present occasion the king, forgetting his usual calmness and assumption of royal dignity, sat listening, questioning, and replying, with an air of anger and heat which must have been painful to any one who had a real reverence for the royal authority. The Baron de Cajare, casting aside the calm and graceful ease which he generally assumed, was now all eagerness, impetuosity, and rage; while Ernest de Nogent, on the contrary, was calm, self-possessed, grave, and stern; and the Duke of Choiseul, on his part, was evidently heated and irritable, and treated the monarch with less deference than might be considered due to royalty.

“Now, sir, now,” said the king, speaking to Ernest de Nogent, “say how you dared to

be in the park at Michy two nights ago, as Monsieur de Cajare proves that you were?"

"I knew not, sire," replied Ernest de No-gent, with that tranquil firmness which we have already noticed, "that either Michy or its park belonged to your majesty; and I think your majesty will admit at once the cause of my going there was a full and sufficient justification for my being found in those grounds. I had heard, sire, that a young lady, to whom my father is under obligations for very great kindness and attention while he was himself sick and I afar, had been kidnapped from her home by a gross and infamous forgery perpetrated by the most debased and villanous of men, and had been then brought into the neighbourhood of Paris by persons who pretended to be your majesty's police, but who were, in fact, the lowest of all those dark and ready scoundrels that swarm in Paris and every large capital."

While the young officer spoke, the king's cheek had turned extremely red and then pale again; but Ernest had gone on, although he

well knew that this change of colour was more likely to proceed from anger than from shame.

“And what, sir, made you a righter of wrongs?” demanded the king, fiercely. “Who entitled you to seek for and arrest these persons that you speak of? Where is your commission under our hand for thus doing?”

“Sire,” replied Ernest, calmly, “I did not seek for these persons to arrest them. With that I had nothing to do; but I sought to set free a young lady unjustly and scandalously detained against her will, to whom both myself and my father were under obligations. I did it not, I acknowledge, from any considerations of general good. Although I might undoubtedly judge that, as the honour of your majesty’s government must suffer more or less from such acts being committed, it was the duty of all your subjects to stop them as soon as possible; yet my object, sire, was to do a just and honourable act of friendship, and for that I required no warrant, sire, from any one.”

What the king’s reply to this bold speech might have been it is impossible to tell, had not

the Duke of Choiseul himself interfered, not by any means to discourage his nephew, but, on the contrary, only to press more strongly what he had advanced.

“Your majesty,” he said, “is not one to deny that — even had Ernest not been moved by any feeling of personal friendship in this matter — he was not only in the right, but was bound in justice to do as he did; to interfere, and, even had it been necessary, to prevent by force of arms any illegal act which he might see committed contrary to your majesty’s honour and the laws of the realm. So say those laws, sire ! So say your own ordonnances ! You could have punished — nay, I am very sure would have punished him, had he failed in his duty in that respect. Your majesty is angry because he ventured into your royal estate of Michy ; but he has, I trust, satisfactorily shown that his so doing proceeded from no disrespect, he being ignorant, as indeed most men are, that your majesty has purchased that estate. — I will take care that it shall be better known, sire, for the future. — May it not be as well to order the

director of the royal domain to place some particular and distinctive mark upon it? But, in the mean time, I am sure your majesty will not only pardon my nephew for having so intruded into the park, but will also thank and reward him for having interfered to free one of your faithful subjects from the hands of such a villainous crew, who, doubtless, by taking the young lady to that place, sought to do an irreparable injury to your majesty's honour and character."

The king did not reply, but looked down and bit his lip; and the Duke of Choiseul having said what he thought fit, became silent again, in order to suffer his words to have their full effect. The Baron de Cajare, however, did not permit the silence to remain unbroken; but seeing that the king did not make any answer, he exclaimed in a harsh tone, "What your majesty may do in vindication of your own honour I cannot tell, but I trust that you will permit me to vindicate mine in the only way open to me."

"Sir," replied Louis, turning upon him

sharply, "I am not aware that my honour is at all attacked; I trust that *you* do not presume to do so."

"Oh no, sire," said the baron, with an insolent smile, "I have as great a regard for your majesty's honour as for my own; and I beseech you to let me vindicate both in one upon the person of this good gentleman, who insulted me, by various acts, in your majesty's park, and you, by being there at all."

Louis paused for a moment or two, as if to consider; but all good feeling and kingly justice was not yet extinct in his bosom, and after a moment he replied, "Silence, sir, you are somewhat insolent. Take care that your own conduct be not inquired into too strictly."

"I humbly beg to say," replied the baron, in a tone of mock humility, "that for this part of my conduct at least, I can plead a justification, which I think will acquit me before any court in Europe; but I would fain not name it, if it may be otherwise."

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes meaningly on the king, who replied at once with a heavy



frown, "Take care, sir! take care! — Now, Monsieur de Nogent, tell me," he continued, "how came you to receive all this excellent information, and whence did it come?"

"Principally from my father, sire," replied Ernest: "he was at Castelneau when the young lady was persuaded to leave her home by a forged letter from her guardian. He it was who told me the greater part of the events which I have now communicated to your majesty, and on which I then acted."

Louis was now beginning to feel — not indeed from any thing that Ernest de Nogent had said, but rather from the words of the Baron de Cajare — that he could not investigate more minutely that which had taken place, without at once boldly avowing the part which he himself had played in the whole transaction. Had that transaction proved successful, he would have had no hesitation in regard to the avowal; but as it was, he did not feel inclined to acknowledge that such acts had been perpetrated by his command. He paused and hesitated, therefore, not with any purpose of abandoning the pursuit in

which he had engaged, for, to speak the truth, opposition and disappointment had, as usual, only made him the more eager, but rather with a view of considering the next step, in order to remove the unexpected obstacles which were cast in his way.

“Your explanation, sir,” he continued, addressing Ernest, “is in some degree satisfactory. Of course you now know where the young lady is; for the report made to me by my lieutenant-general of police shows that she was not to be found in the château when his agents searched it.”

“I was with them the whole time, may it please your majesty,” replied Ernest — “I was never absent from them a moment; and the house was certainly searched in the strictest and most rigorous manner, without the slightest trace being discovered of where the young lady was. I should have felt inclined to suppose, indeed, that she had never been there, had not the people we found in the place acknowledged that she had. They said, moreover, that nobody had been there but Monsieur de Cajare; so that it

is to be presumed her escape was effected while he was attacking me in the park."

Ernest's words produced a different effect from that which he had intended. He himself had not the slightest suspicion that the Baron de Cajare either knew where Annette now was or had taken any share in her flight; nor did he at all intend to instil such suspicions into the mind of the king. Louis, however, seized them at once, and asked, "Did she escape, Monsieur de Nogent? that is the question — did she escape? Monsieur de Cajare was the last person that saw her then? — From you, sir, we shall require an account of her," he added, turning to the baron.

"Sire, you do me injustice," said the Baron de Cajare; "I saw her certainly, but only for the purpose of executing the orders I had received ——"

"Silence, sir," cried the king, "silence! Let me hear not one word from you, but in answer to the questions I address to you. Monsieur de Nogent, ask the page at the door if the fresh report which I have required from the lieu-

tenant-general be ready. Now, Monsieur le Comte de Castelneau," the monarch continued, "while Ernest left the room for a moment, "you will be good enough to inform me whether you yourself do or do not know where this young lady is? You see that a serious charge is likely to gather together against Monsieur de Cajare, and I require a positive and distinct answer to the question I have put."

"Most distinctly then and positively," replied the count calmly, "I have not the slightest or most distant idea of where Mademoiselle de St. Morin is, or what is become of her."

"This is all very strange, I must say," replied the king; "and, as I said before, I shall look to the Baron de Cajare for further information."

"In fact, sire," replied the baron, "those who serve your majesty best are to be the most severely dealt with."

"You hear, Monsieur de Choiseul," said the king.

"I do, sire," replied the duke, "and I think I understand your majesty's intentions, too."

“Stay !” said the king, “stay ! We may find something more here, either to exculpate or to condemn this gentleman.” While he was speaking, Ernest re-entered the cabinet, bearing a packet in his hand, which he delivered to the king, who tore open the seals hastily, and looked over the contents. As he did so his brow gathered heavily together, and he read the paper aloud as follows : “The deposition of Maître Pierre Jean, taken in the royal prison of the Châtelet, this 24th of September, 17—. That the said Pierre Jean did accompany the Baron de Cajare—and so forth—That the said Pierre Jean, on finding that the Baron de Cajare had gone up to the room in which Mademoiselle de St. Morin was confined, did follow him quietly ; and going round by the back corridor to the other door of the chamber, listened attentively to all the conversation that took place, and heard distinctly the said baron tell Mademoiselle de St. Morin that he had come there for the purpose of delivering her from the hands into which she had fallen ——”

“I think that this is quite enough,” said the

king. "Call the page, Monsieur de Nogent — send a guard in here directly. — Monsieur le Baron, when you think fit, by a letter addressed to us, and marked private, to make known where this young lady is, your case shall have due consideration. Offer no reply, sir, but retire into the antechamber, and wait there while Monsieur de Choiseul makes out an order for your committal to the Bastile."

The baron bowed his head and retired; nor did he make the slightest attempt to escape, though there was no one in the anteroom when he entered it; for such was the strange sort of prestige attached in those days to the idea of the royal power in France, that an order, such as that which had just been pronounced by the lips of the sovereign himself, seemed to paralyse all those faculties which might otherwise have been used effectually for the purposes of flight.

Although the weight of the king's indignation — perhaps pointed by some degree of apprehension lest his secrets should be betrayed by his emissary — had thus fallen upon the Baron de Cajare, there were none of the persons who

then stood before him towards whom Louis felt any very kindly feelings. Even the Duke of Choiseul, who possessed his affection, if ever any one did so, had now given him bitter offence, which was not forgotten in many an after-day, and which was called to mind when other causes for anger arose between the king and the favourite minister.

For a moment or two after the Baron de Cajare had retired, Louis continued gazing upon the floor, and biting his pale lip; while the Duc de Choiseul, kneeling upon one of the cushions, wrote the *lettre de cachet* for the king's signature. When the document was completed, signed, and countersigned, Louis rose, and addressing the count, he said, "You will, sir, after spending this day in Paris — which I give you for the arrangement of your affairs — you will, sir, return immediately to Versailles, and not quit that town for more than five leagues' distance, till you receive my permission so to do. — Monsieur de Nogent, your leave of absence was given you for the purpose of visiting your father. You had better proceed into Quercy at

once. Monsieur de Choiseul, I have to speak to you further, and in private, upon affairs of more importance than these."

Thus saying, he bowed his head, and the count and his young friend retired from the presence of the king.



## CHAP. XIII.

WE must now return to one in whom our affections are engaged, and whom we have left somewhat too long already. We have seen the feelings with which Annette de St. Morin heard the Baron de Cajare calling in familiar terms to the man who had been the chief instrument in deceiving her into a situation of pain and difficulty. It is an old and common observation, that courage sometimes springs from despair; and although, from the moment that her false arrest had taken place, she had never yet dreamt of making her escape from a power she knew to be too vigilant and active for any such simple art as hers to elude, yet she now contemplated such an escape, not only as most desirable, but as possible, convinced that she had been deceived, and trusting to receive support and assistance from the real police of the realm, if she could

once free herself from the hands of those who so unjustly detained her. Unaccustomed, however, to act in circumstances of sudden emergency, with nothing to guide her but her own natural good sense, with no knowledge of the spot in which she was, and no experience of the world in which she was about to move, it was very natural that Annette should hesitate with alarm and agitation when she contemplated going forth alone and unprotected, into a world where all was strange, and fearful to her imagination.

“Donnine,” she said, “we must endeavour to make our escape! That man is deceiving us; we cannot trust to him. If we could but get to Paris, and find my guardian’s house, we should be in safety.”

“Oh! of course,” replied Donnine; “of course we should be in safety there; but do you know where we are, dear lady, and which is the way to Paris?”

Annette paused and thought, and then clasped her hands as if in despair. The moment after, however, she said, “Well, Donnine, well, gather together what smaller articles we

can carry. I feel certain, from what I have seen and heard, that it will be better to wander through the fields all night than remain in this place. Make haste, Donnine! Make haste, good Donnine, or they will be back before we can make our escape. Hark! I hear voices below," and running to one of the windows, she gazed out. She there saw a number of persons, bearing torches, issue forth from the portico, upon the little terrace before the château; and she repeated —

" Quick, quick, Donnine: they are all going out to seek the people that he said were lingering in the park. We may, perhaps, escape while they are so engaged."

Donnine shook her head as if she doubted very much that her young mistress's plan would succeed; but she obeyed the orders which she had received, and with Annette's maid and the old man-servant, Joachim, who was called in to assist, proceeded to gather together all the things which had been brought in thither from the carriage on their arrival. Annette, herself, gave what aid she could, and was endeavouring

to select those objects that seemed most needful from the mass, when the sudden rising of the latch of the lock startled her, and she gazed up with a look of consternation and surprise.

Her astonishment was not diminished by what she beheld; for, advancing towards her from the door, with a quick step and a look of eagerness and anxiety, was a lady dressed in deep mourning, and at first, Annette, though she remembered the countenance as one she had seen somewhere before, could not attach to it any definite idea of the where, and the when, and the how she had first become acquainted with it. The next moment, however, there rose up before her mind, as if by magic, the whole scene of the little fountain and the cross, in the wood near Castelneau, and of the lady that she had there so strangely met; and a light like that of hope beamed upon her from the past, as she became convinced that the same person again stood before her.

The lady advanced direct towards her, and again, as before, threw her arms around her, and held her to her heart with tears in her eyes.

It was but for a moment, however, that she now gave way ; for the minute after she exclaimed, “ Quick, my beloved child ! I come to rescue you, Annette ! But there is not an instant to lose, for we cannot count upon five minutes as our own. Take merely what is absolutely necessary, and leave the rest. Any loss is better than the loss of time at this moment.”

As she spoke, her eyes ran over all the packages which good Donnine and the rest had been busily gathering together ; but she still held Annette by the hand, drawing her gently towards the door. Donnine looked up and gazed in the lady’s face for a moment, then made her a lowly courtesy, asking, “ What shall I take, madam ? ”

“ What is absolutely necessary and nothing more,” replied the lady hurriedly. “ Come, sweet child ! come ! come, all of you, as fast but as silently as possible ; ” and while Donnine snatched up hastily various packages, which, as usual on such occasions, were the things of all others that were not wanted, she led Annette

on into the adjoining chamber, and the servants followed one by one. In the anteroom, the lady paused for a moment to enjoin silence once more, and to beg those that followed to keep together. She then, however, instead of turning to the door which led out into the great corridor, directed her steps towards a smaller door on the left-hand side, which neither Annette nor her servants had yet had time to examine.

The lady opened it cautiously and looked out, and Annette beheld the top of a small back staircase, constructed apparently for the passage of servants to and fro. No lamp or candle was to be seen, but a faint light came up from below ; and the lady, leaning over the railing, inquired in a low voice, " Are you there, Gaultier ? "

" Yes, madam," replied some one from the bottom of the steps ; and the lady exclaiming, " Come, Annette, come," held out her hand to lead her down.

She felt that poor Annette trembled with anxiety and agitation ; and she said, lowering

her voice again, "Fear not, my dear child, fear not, there is scarcely a possibility of our being stopped. We are strongly supported, and have those to befriend us who can befriend us well."

Annette assured her that she did not fear, and she said true, for it was not exactly fear that she felt. Agitation she certainly did experience, and that in no slight degree; but it was more of a joyful than a painful character—it was that eagerness of new-raised hope, and expectation, which sometimes performs the part of fear, in making the heart flutter and the limbs tremble.

Following lightly down the stairs then, she kept close to her fair guide, while the servants came after, gazing round them at every step with looks of apprehension and wonder. They saw evidently that their mistress had some previous acquaintance with the lady who had thus strangely visited her, and the *soubrette* who was accustomed to examine the looks of *Madame Donnine*, almost as much as those of her actual mistress, thought that she perceived a

look of intelligence in the good housekeeper's countenance, which she would have given half her little fortune to fathom.

All was quiet and solitary also, till they reached the second flight of steps, but there a man was found waiting, well armed, and holding a lamp in his hand, which he raised high above his head, in order to light the party who were descending. On reaching the bottom of the staircase, a long dark passage was seen stretching on one side to the right, and on the other to the left. In the latter direction it seemed to be terminated by a door, at which stood another armed man, who remained motionless, though his eyes were turned in the direction of those who were coming down from above. The lady beckoned him forward, as soon as her foot touched the pavement, and asked him a question in a low tone, to which he replied a little louder, saying, "It is locked, madam, and bolted too."

"Come then," she said, "come quick. Are they all here?"

As she spoke, she gave a glance at the party



assembled at the foot of the stairs, and then again hurried on, leading Annette by the hand.

It may seem strange to the reader, that, however simple and inexperienced Annette de St. Morin might be, she should go with the most perfect tranquillity and confidence with a person whom she had only seen once before, and who afforded no explanation whatsoever of her views, purposes, or character. So it was, however: Annette had not the slightest doubt; she accompanied that lady as confidently as if she had known her for many long years; she felt sure she was leading her aright; she entertained not a doubt that she was interested to save her from the evil hands into which she had fallen. What were the sensations that produced such confidence, I cannot say; but certain it is that it existed.

She went on, then, as readily and willingly as if the whole had been explained; and passing on through several passages communicating with the different offices of the building, but without meeting with one single living soul, except the two armed men whom we have mentioned, the

fugitives at length arrived at a door which was open, and through which Annette felt streaming the cool breeze of an autumnal night. That air, and the sensation of freedom which it brought with it, produced the sweetest of all reliefs to Annette's heart. It was the sensation of liberty, it was the pulse of freedom, it was the breaking the bonds from off the heart. She now knew even more than before, how much she had suffered — how heavy had been the weight upon her during the last three or four days; for, now that it was removed, she felt that she could weep, and the tears did rise in her eyes, notwithstanding all she could do to restrain them.

Issuing forth from the château by a small back door, they found themselves in what was called the *basse cour*. No one was there, but the gate on the other side was again held open for them by an armed man, who followed them as they passed through; and taking their way across another little court, they came into a field, across which there was a path. It was evident that they were still in the grounds of

the château, however; for Annette could see the outline of a wall bordering the meadow, and she did not feel herself secure so long as she remained within those dangerous precincts. The night was so dark, that she could not distinguish any thing but the mere wall till they had well nigh crossed the open space; but at length, with joy and satisfaction indescribable, she beheld a small gate in the enclosure, which they found open, and in an instant the whole party were in the by-road leading from Puiset to Fontainebleau.

It is true, Annette had no idea of where she was; but it was clear that she was now free, and she did weep right heartily. Not twenty yards from the gate stood a carriage, with a coachman and two other men on foot, holding some horses, and towards the coach the lady led her tenderly forward, whispering, “You are safe, dear child! You are safe!”

Every thing now passed easily and rapidly: Annette took her place in the vehicle, the lady seated herself by her side; the two women servants also found room, and the men occupied

a place on the outside. The armed servants who had come with the lady herself, mounted the horses which were standing near, and without any word being given, as soon as the door was closed, the carriage began to move forward at as rapid a rate as the nature of the road would permit.

Annette was still weeping; but she felt the arm of her fair companion cast round her, and her hand pressed tenderly in that soft hand which had guided her from the dangerous abode in which she had been placed, while the sweet melancholy voice of her who had taken so strange an interest in her fate whispered tenderly, anxiously, in her ear, "You are safe, dear Annette — you are safe. It is for this moment that I have lived so long."

There might be a thousand things that Annette would have liked to ask; there might be a thousand hopes, and anxieties, and expectations which required satisfaction; but she felt it was not a moment to make inquiries of any kind, especially as she was not alone with the lady who had set her free.

For more than two hours the carriage rolled on rapidly, and then came a momentary pause while fresh horses were put on, after which it began to move forward at the same pace, and did not stop for nearly three hours more. Again the horses were changed, and again for an hour and a half they proceeded on their way, till at length, by some faint streaks of light that began to appear in the eastern sky, Annette perceived a long avenue of trees, a river, and a château at some short distance. In ten minutes more they drove into the court of the mansion itself. The whole household seemed to be up and watching. The great doors at the top of a flight of steps were thrown open, and a blaze of cheerful light came forth from the vestibule. The lady led Annette on by the hand up those steps, and through the hall, into a large and magnificent saloon, where some light refreshments were laid out.

The walls of the room were wainscotted with black oak, without any other ornament whatsoever, except the rich carving of the cornices and mouldings; but in the centre of one of the

panels was a small portrait in a thick heavy frame. To it the lady led up Annette at once, and without a word pointed to the picture with her hand. It was beautifully executed, and represented a gentleman in a military dress in the act of mounting his horse. He seemed to be taking leave of some one, and looked full into the room, while his left hand was represented gracefully waving his hat and plume with an expression of joy and buoyant happiness which it is difficult to describe.

As soon as she saw it, Annette put her hand to her brow, exclaiming, "I have seen that before—I have seen that before at Castelneau ! I have seen it, and know it well ; for I have looked at it for many an hour. Oh, what a countenance ! Oh, what a look !"

The lady cast her arms around her, bent down her head upon Annette's shoulder, and wept bitterly. Whether it was the sympathy with grief that is in every fine and affectionate human heart ; or some of those many latent causes, those fine and mysterious links between being and being which never have been,

and perhaps never will be, explained, which set idle metaphysics altogether at fault, and tell us, perhaps, as much as we can ever know in this world of the workings of the immaterial spirit within us, and of its communion with other spirits — whether it proceeded from any of these causes, from sources more deep and inexplicable still, or from others more plain and apparent, I cannot tell, but Annette saw not the grief of the lady unmoved, looked not upon that picture without strong emotion herself, and giving way to all she felt, she too bowed down her head and mingled her tears with those of her companion.

They were not allowed a long space of time to indulge in such emotions; for one of the servants who had accompanied the carriage entered the room the moment after, and approaching the lady with a respectful air, whispered a few words to her in a low voice.

The lady started, and put her hand to her brow. “Indeed!” she said, “indeed! How far did he come?”

“Half way through the second stage, madam,” replied the servant.

“That is unfortunate,” said the lady — “most unfortunate. Dearest Annette, we have not yet found repose ; but, at all events, we are a long way in advance, and we will not suffer them to succeed — no, not if we should quit France. Ask no questions, my sweet child, but take some refreshment, then three hours of repose, and then let us onward to whatever fate may lie before us.”



## CHAP. XIV.

WE must now for a time return to the château of Michy, and to the back staircase and small passages through which Annette took her way in making her escape. Those passages, as we have said, were deserted by every one as she went through them; not a human being presented itself; for the door which led to the kitchen of the château, always an important and busy quarter of a French house, was that which we have seen guarded with so much care, and which the servant pronounced to be locked when he quitted it. The other offices past which Annette's course was directed were merely sculleries, pantries, larders, and places of a similar description; and all was silent and dull as the grave, as long as the lady and her companions were on their way through them. The moment, however, that they were gone,

from underneath a sort of table or dresser in one of the sculleries, crept out a small but well-formed boy, apparently not more than eight or nine years of age, but in reality considerably past his fourteenth year. He was dressed in the greasy and lowly garb of a *marmiton*, the lowest of all the culinary officers of a French house; but there was an air of shrewd and malicious penetration in the boy's eyes, which spoke a spirit well calculated to succeed in other and more dangerous employments than the somewhat warm but innocent occupations of the kitchen.

The moment that he came forth, he burst into a low, disagreeable, half-suppressed laugh; then looked sharply and keenly round him as if afraid that somebody might be lingering near to mark his merriment. That glance, however, satisfied him that he was alone; and then he chuckled again and spoke to himself, seeming to enjoy the business in which he was engaged very highly. "Ha, ha, ha!" he said, "they shall see who will be *marmiton* much longer. Yon great, greasy-livered cook shall beat me

no more with his ladle as if I were a turnspit dog. Not he ! forsooth, not he. Nor that great wild bully Merliton kick me along the passage like a ball. — Ay ! if I was such a fool as my companion Jonah now, I should go and tell those scavengers of court filth what I have seen ; but I am no such ass as that. I'll put my money in my own sack, and soon see where they carry you pretty piece of pastry. The king will give a rare sum for tidings of her journey ; and while they are all drinking and quarrelling together and letting her escape, I will make free with the horses in the stable, and away after her to give notice of her course — trust me for dodging the hare back to her form."

Thus saying, the *marmiton*, with another of his low disagreeable laughs, crept quietly out by the same door through which Annette had made her exit, and looked shrewdly through the darkness after her and her companions.

The path which they followed was, like every other path on earth, winding and tortuous. We have something of the serpent in us all, which, alas ! never allows us to go straight forward to

our object, even if it be from one corner of a field to another. The *marmiton*, however, who knew the windings of the path by old experience, took a shorter way through the grass ; and as soon as he had seen Annette and her companions safely in the coach, he sprang with a light bound on the top of the wall, indulging in one of his triumphant chuckles, which it seems called the attention of the principal servant who attended the carriage. Running along with the agility of a squirrel upon the eminence which he had attained, the boy almost kept pace with the vehicle that bore Annette till he reached the end of the wall, where there appeared a low building with a little court and a gate leading out upon the road. This building was, in fact, a stable in which the gentry, whom we have seen revelling at the château, kept the horses which served to carry them to and fro upon their various discreditable expeditions. One of these horses was soon brought forth by the boy, saddled and equipped, and although the stirrups could not be brought up sufficiently to suit the shortness of his legs, yet he con-

trived to make himself a good seat by thrusting his feet into the leathers, and thus sallied forth in pursuit of the carriage.

For thirty miles he kept up with it well, his weight being so light as in no degree to fatigue the horse. The vehicle was now making its way towards the Beauvoisis, having left Paris on one side, and following the direction of Chantilly and Clermont, and the boy was obliged to slacken his pace, though not to abandon the pursuit. He kept the coach in view, indeed, till it reached the last place where it changed horses, and there suffering it to go on while he himself paused to give his own charger some sort of refreshment, he made many ingenious inquiries as to the direction which the carriage had taken, and who was the proprietor thereof. He soon discovered or suspected that the two horse boys, who were the only persons up, had been instructed to mislead him; and, indeed, there was a jocular sort of wink of the eye while they answered his questions, which might well create such an impression. The name that they gave in reply to his inquiries

was evidently a false one, and certainly did not deceive him; and the direction they told him the carriage was about to take, he concluded might be wrong also, though he did not feel quite so sure of that. Shrewd beyond his years, and experienced in every minor sort of trickery, he watched, as well as he could by the dim light, the countenances of those with whom he spoke. He judged, and judged rightly, that they suspected him of reading their replies the reverse way, and he imagined that they might therefore tell him what was right in one particular in order to cheat him the more surely. He resolved, therefore, to be upon his guard; and though he went on fast wherever there were no carriage paths to the right or left, he stopped at each turning, and examined accurately whether fresh traces of wheels and horses' feet were to be discovered. Thus he pursued his plan successfully, and did not again stop till he had traced the vehicle into the gates of the château, where we have seen Annette take refuge.

In the village opposite to the gates of that

building, he paused for two or three hours in order to refresh his horse, and there, by inquiries, he easily ascertained what was the name of the mansion. Satisfied with this information, he rode slowly back on the way to Versailles, and presenting himself at the palace, demanded boldly to speak with the king.

The Swiss to whom he addressed himself laughed him to scorn, saying, "Get away, you greasy rascalion ; do you think the king speaks with such dirty young vagabonds as you are? Why, he would not get the smell of pots and kettles out of his nose for a month. Get away, get away, I tell you. I would make my cane fly about your shoulders if I were not afraid that it would get befouled by such a dirty acquaintance."

The boy was not a little disappointed, but, nevertheless, he was not driven to despair. Being determined to gain his point, perfectly unscrupulous as to means, and seeing what was the obstacle which lay in his way, he took himself back to Paris without delay, and there prepared to supply the means which were

wanting, by the unceremonious sale of the horse which he had borrowed from the stables at Michy.

In the good city of Paris, rogues of all kinds, sorts, and descriptions abound, and ever have abounded. The harvest of such gentry then was not at all deficient at the time I speak of; and amongst the rest, buyers of stolen goods were never found wanting to persons who had such articles to dispose of. The horse of the *marmiton* was at once judged, by the man to whom he offered it, to be that sort of merchandize which, being somewhat dangerous to the traffickers therein, may be bought and sold very much below its real value. It was somewhat knocked up also: the saddle and bridle, however, were in excellent condition, and the chapman, being rather honest than otherwise, absolutely gave the boy one fifth of what the whole was worth. With this sum, which was to him immense, our *marmiton* proceeded to the shop of a *fripier*, where, without difficulty, he obtained for himself a very smart suit which had once belonged



to one of the royal pages of honour, who had outgrown it, and transmitted it to his father's valet, who sent it to the abode where the *marmiton* found it. The boy had sold the horse at so great a loss, both because he did not dare drive a hard bargain about stolen goods, and because he was utterly ignorant of the value of the article he had to dispose of; but he was very nearly a match for the *fripier*, whose commodities were much more in his own line, and he obtained the clothes really not too dear. The worthy old clothesman added also a piece of advice which was somewhat useful to the *marmiton*.

"Be advised, my good boy," he said, "and before you put on that suit, wash your face and hands, or your dirty face and your clean coat will make the people believe that you have stolen either the one or the other, and it cannot very well be your own countenance."

"Well," said the boy, "I'll wash myself if I can get water, for I am going to the king, and one must not go with dirty hands."

"Going to the king, you dirty shrimp?"

exclaimed the *fripier* ; “ what mean you by going to the king ? The king will have nothing to say to such a turnspit dog as you ! ”

“ You are mistaken there, though, Master Threadbare,” replied the *marmiton* ; “ the king will have a great deal to say to me, for I have got a great deal to say to him that he will give half a province to hear, if I judge right.”

“ A secret ! ” said the *fripier*, beginning to be more interested : “ pray what is that, my boy ? ”

The boy laughed in his face, replying, “ You must think me soft enough ; but if you want to tell my secret to the king before me, tell him that he has more rogues in Paris than he knows of, and put yourself at the head of the list. Ha, ha, ha ! ”

He was quitting the shop with a shout of laughter, but the *fripier* was one of those who, having really a genius as well as a passion for intrigue of all kinds, was immediately interested in the boy, both on account of the nature of his enterprise, and the talent which he showed for that sort of undertaking.

“ Stay, my lad, stay,” he cried ; “ do not be

too hasty. I will give you some advice, if you stop but for a moment, which shall cost you nothing if it does not succeed, and which, if you really have a secret worth any thing, may make your fortune."

"Ay?" said the boy, pausing to listen; "tell me what that may be?"

"Come hither," said the man, "and attend to what I have to say. You can never get speech to the king unless you have somebody to introduce you to him; now, I will get you such an introduction, if you will give me a couple of louis for douceur."

"How can you do that any more than myself?" replied the boy. "You are but a cleaner of used clothes, and I a cleaner of used plates. There's not much difference between us, for that matter; and I am not going to commit the sin of paying two louis for what God gives freely."

"And what is that?" cried the *fripier*. — "What is that, my young riddler?"

"Why, empty air," replied the boy: "fine words I mean, Master Threadbare — fat pro-

mises, and thin performances. No, no, I will pay nothing for that."

"Heaven forbid that you should," answered the *fripier*. "Why, lad, you are as suspicious as a ratcatcher's dog; but I'll show in a minute, how I can do all that I promise to do. Tell me, my lad — you seem to know something of the court — who is the king's *valet-de-chambre*? Can you say?"

"Ay, that I can, well," replied the boy. "Many a cuff has Master Lebel given me in his day."

"Right, boy, right," replied the *fripier*, judging from the boy's instant answer that he was in reality acquainted with the court. "Well, then, look at this letter, if you can read, and see whose name is signed at the bottom."

The boy took the letter, and read it through. "Ha, ha!" he said: "he is coming to you to-night, and wants a hundred louis: I understand you now. You would have me tell my secret to him: is that it?"

"No," answered the *fripier* — "No, no, my boy, I see you are too shrewd for that: nor

would I ever advise it. Master Lebel is one of those who will never let any one benefit by any thing whereby he can benefit himself. No, but he may bring you to the presence of the king, if you really have a secret worth telling."

"Ha, ha ! this is something like now," replied the boy. "Come, Master Fripier, you are likely to win your two louis ; but we must about the business speedily, or some one may step in before us."

"You see," replied the *fripier*, "that he marks seven o'clock here as the hour when he is to be here — so, my boy, we can do nothing before that. Come to me at that hour, and I will introduce you to him, and then, if you do not manage matters, it is your fault, not mine."

"Right," replied the boy, "right. I wo'n't miss my mark, depend upon it, but be here at seven exactly : so now fare you well, good friend."

"One more word before you go," replied the *fripier*, "which is a word of good counsel, too, my lad, and no offence in life to a young

gentleman of honour who is seeking to make his way in the world."

"What is it?" said the boy — "What is it?"

"Only this," answered the *fripier*, "if you should by any chance have stolen the money as well as the secret, you had better keep yourself quite quiet and out of sight for the rest of the day. There is a good inn, not far off, round that corner, there, where people lie snug occasionally."

"Oh! I never steal any thing," answered the boy; "but I am tired, and going to sleep, so I shall be quiet enough. Good-by, good-by," and away he went.

At the hour of seven, in the grey light which at that time of day and season of the year pervaded the inner recesses of a Parisian shop — especially when it was situated in the far depths of the city, where house piled upon house, and lane jostling alley, cut off great part of the rays even of the meridian sun — there sat together the *fripier* and the *valet-de-chambre* of the king, who, though calling himself on all occasions a

gentleman, (Heaven defend us!) did not scruple, when occasion served, to frequent such places as those in which we now find him. He might be seen at many times, when the daylight was somewhat dim, entering many a low shop, prying into many a poor abode, and sometimes sojourning long therein, either upon his master's account or his own.

His views and occupations on many of these occasions we will not offend the reader by inquiring into — suffice it to notice the personal business which now led him to the dwelling of the *fripier*. With him, as with many others in his situation, though he derived large sums from the vices and follies of those upon whom he was dependent, the contact with their corruption induced habits of expense which often left him poor in the midst of opulence. When he saw a king, beggared in finances, unscrupulously pillage his subjects to supply materials for his own gratifications, no one can wonder that he was inclined to pillage his king for the same purposes. Thus Master Lebel often laid his hand upon perquisites, his rights to which

were more than doubtful, and often sent to the abode of our good friend the *fripier* articles which might have long appeared upon the king's person, or ornamented Versailles, had he not discovered some flaw which, in his opinion, rendered them unworthy of the royal touch. Sometimes, also, he was obliged to anticipate such resources, and calculating that garments still new would wear with time, and must find their way into his hands, he would sell the monarch's robes upon his back, and thus extract some gold from the close purse of the serviceable friend with whom he was now conversing.

The *fripier* had told him of his adventure with the boy, and Lebel had just laughed with a scornful sneer at such a person as the other described having any thing worthy of the king's ear, when the *marmiton* himself appeared, dressed in his new plumage, and looking, to say sooth, both smart and graceful, though still of course very diminutive in size, the new clothes having expanded his heart without enlarging his person.

“ Good even, Monsieur Lebel,” he said.



“Good even to your worship. I dare to say this good gentleman has told you that I want speech of his majesty.”

The *valet-de-chambre* stared at the boy with as scrutinising a glance as the state of the light in the shop would admit, and remained a moment or two gazing upon him intently, as if for the very purpose of confusing and abashing him. But the *marmiton* was one not so easily put out of countenance, and he was, moreover, impressed with a great idea of his own importance; an idea which, certainly, when it is sufficiently fixed and strong, carries us through innumerable difficulties and dangers, in which our boat would founder without the aid of that buoyant cork-like quality called self-conceit.

“Well, Master Lebel,” said the *marmiton* at length; “you seem in a contemplative mood this morning. Pray let me know when you have done, and give me an answer whether you will bring me to speech of the king; or shall I apply to another?”

“Bring you to speech of the king!” exclaimed Lebel. “You saucy Jack Snipe, I

will bring you to acquaintance with a horse-whip. Why your face, though you have scrubbed it, is as clear upon my recollection covered with grease and smoke, as if I had beheld it yesterday."

"Then where did you behold it?" demanded the boy, saucily. "If you have seen it, you can doubtless tell where."

"Do you think I recollect by the mark every brass pot I meet with?" rejoined Lebel. "But we will soon bring down your impudence, good youth. I pray thee, Monsieur Vingtun, send for an archer from the police bureau. Depend upon it, this boy has stolen money to buy his fine clothes. We must have him to the Châtelet. Do not let him get away."

"Oh, no fear! no fear!" answered the boy, whose courage and impudence had risen rather than decreased by food, rest, and reflection. "No fear of my going, Master Lebel. Here I sit, send for whom you will. Only remember, that I tell you I have something to say to the king which he would give half a province to hear; and as he must know the whole matter

sooner or later, you can judge whether he will be well pleased to find that you have kept the tidings from him till perhaps it may be too late, and have also maltreated the messenger. Now send for all the archers in France if you will, I care not. They will bring me to the presence of the king, if you do not."

There was something so cool and satisfied in the boy's whole tone and manner, that it was evident he at least thought his secret of import; and there was also something so shrewd and clever in his looks and words, that Lebel inferred he was not likely to make a bad guess of what the king would like to hear. Now the *valet-de-chambre* would have given half a pound of the best snuff that he ever took from a royal canister — and that for him would have been a considerable sacrifice — to learn the boy's secret, for the purpose of knowing whether it was really worth retailing, and of making use of it for his own purposes; but the boy was evidently impenetrable; and as the next best thing, Lebel continued to stare in his face, for the purpose of ascertaining where he had seen him before —

a fact which had utterly escaped from his memory, though he was quite sure that the boy's face had met his eyes many a time.

At length a sudden light seemed to strike him. "Ha!" he exclaimed: "now I recollect! You are the little villain of a *marmiton* who put sugar into my basin of soup, the other day at Michy."

"The same, Monsieur Lebel! the same!" replied the *marmiton*; "and the same whose ears you boxed for so doing."

"Now I begin to see the whole matter," said Lebel, thoughtfully. "So, I know your business now."

"Ay?" said the boy, somewhat apprehensive that his secret might have escaped by some other channel: "how so, I pray you, Monsieur Lebel?"

"Why, simply this," replied the valet, "that the young lady — I mean the last — that was brought to Michy — has been carried off from that place."

"Phoo!" cried the boy, "you know nothing about it!"

“I know as much as the king,” replied the *valet-de-chambre*; “and, moreover, there has been a sad to do about it this very morning at Versailles.”

“Well,” answered the boy in a more important tone than ever; “it is in order to make the king know more than either he or you know, that I want to see him. If you bring me to him, I will tell him how the whole happened, every step the girl took, where she went to, and where she now is.”

“If you tell that, your fortune is made,” cried Lebel. “Come with me! come with me! and you shall be Monsieur Marmiton for the rest of your life?”

## CHAP. XV.

WHEN Lebel and the *marmiton* arrived at Versailles, it was found that the king was occupied, and no one dared to disturb him for the time. The audience, therefore, which the boy solicited was of necessity delayed till the following morning, and during the course of the whole evening, he was subjected to an ordeal, after which he might have been considered as well qualified for admission into any diplomatic cabinet in Europe. The Court of Savoy itself could not have produced any one shrewder, or more skilful at detecting and parrying every subtle contrivance of an enemy, than the *marmiton* proved himself to be in his conversation with Lebel. The latter left no means untried, either by a quiet jest, a sly question upon something apparently totally unconnected with the subject, a trap within trap, which he fancied it entirely impos-

sible that the boy could discover, or, in short, any other art whatsoever which the wit of man could devise to worm out of the boy his secret, for the purpose of making use of it himself. To his surprise, however, he found that in this sort of mental fencing, the boy took as much delight as he did himself, or even more, for when he, frustrated at every point, suffered the subject to drop for a moment, the lad with a degree of malicious fun would cunningly lead the conversation back towards the same topic, and engage the disappointed valet in new efforts, which were frustrated as before. The next object of Lebel was, to prevent the boy holding any communication with the other personages of the royal household; and he, therefore, kept him in his rooms all night, under strong apprehensions lest any one should get hold of him, and bring him without his participation to the royal ear.

As early the next morning as possible, the fact of the boy's presence at Versailles was notified to the king, and he was admitted to the royal chamber while Louis was dressing.

He stood in one corner of the room while all the pompous foolery took place which, by that time, had become a rule of state at the rising of a French monarch. Every gentleman who had a claim to hand to the king any part of his wardrobe was there present, the one giving Louis his shirt, another his waistcoat, another his stockings, and the whole of the undignified process being gone through with an air of solemn gravity as if it had been an execution. The various nobles gazed at the boy, from time to time, as he stood in the corner, wondering what brought him there, and sometimes, misled by his gay apparel into a belief that he was a person of consequence, experiencing sensations of jealousy and apprehension lest this new claimant should take from them a part of the royal favours.

As soon as Louis was up, and, by the different arts and appliances of the day, had been made to look somewhat more king-like and youthful than he did at first, he turned towards a small cabinet which lay to the right of his bedroom, and making a sign to the boy, he said, "Come



hither, come hither ; Lebel bring him hither.—  
Give me a *robe de chambre*.”

He addressed one of the gentlemen who stood nearest to him, and who immediately took up a dressing-gown which lay at hand and offered it to the monarch. At that very instant, however, another nobleman laid his hand upon the arm of the first, and insisted that it was his right to hand the dressing-gown. The first replied that the king had spoken to him. The one claimed by the king's immediate command, the other by his ancient right, and for several minutes the king was kept waiting ; till at length he was obliged to decide the dispute himself, and of course gave his judgment in favour of etiquette. The person whose privilege it was handed him the dressing-gown, but the king, somewhat cold, and very impatient, forbade him to assist in putting it on, and conferred that honour upon the other. He then retired into the cabinet, followed by Lebel and the boy, and remained there for half an hour, with the door closed upon the whole party of attendant nobles.

The conversation which took place between the monarch, the *valet-de-chambre*, and the *marmiton*, on every account had better not be transcribed, for it is well known that in his communications with the pitiful minions who surrounded him, and the vile instruments of his pleasures, Louis forgot both what was due to his character as a gentleman and his character as a king. The result, however, was, that at the end of the half hour, while he remained in the cabinet and finished there the operations of his toilet, Lebel and the boy issued forth and went together to a room on the ground floor, where a single secretary was found busily writing by himself. The *valet-de-chambre* leaned down beside him, saying, in a low, quiet tone, “Be pleased, Monsieur Hastelmont, to draw up an order for the liberation of Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, and carry it up for the king’s signature; after which you will have the kindness to put this young gentleman upon the king’s household-book as one of the pages of the ante-chamber, with a pension of eight hundred livres.”

The secretary looked round to the boy, and, perfectly ignorant of his previous condition, said in a quiet tone, "Will you have the goodness, sir, to tell me your Christian and surname?"

"My name is Julien Beaufils," replied the boy, and the secretary made a note thereof, with the directions which Lebel had given him.

"Now, sir," said Lebel, speaking to the boy in the same tone as the secretary had assumed, "if you will go to my room I will join you in a minute or two, and we will have breakfast before you set out."

The boy went away without reply, and the moment his back was turned the secretary inquired of Lebel, with somewhat of a grin, "Who have you got there, *mon cher*?"

"The devil himself for cunning," replied Lebel; "I believe he has done more for himself with the king in half an hour than many another man would do in a lifetime. I have never seen his equal in impudence, shrewdness, and hypocrisy."

“Not when you looked in the glass, Lebel?” replied the secretary, with a laugh. “You have done well for yourself, I fancy, too.”

“Not I,” answered Lebel: “but he is beyond any of us. Why, the day before yesterday, he was a *marmiton* at Michy. However, Monsieur Hastelmont, be so kind as to make out those orders, and draw also an order for fifty crowns for me.”

“Nonsense, Lebel,” replied the secretary; “you know very well I cannot do that without the king’s commands.”

“The king intends it, indeed,” replied Lebel: “you may ask him, if you doubt me,” and thus saying, he went away in another direction. In a moment or two after, he was speaking to the captain of the guard — one of the officers of the old régime, indeed, but one whose humble devotion towards his sovereign was elevated by none of those high and chivalrous feelings which were at one time characteristic of the French nobility. The officer in question laid his hand upon his heart, shrugged up his shoulders, de-

clared himself ready to obey his monarch's orders to the death, and immediately gave some commands to one of his inferiors in grade.

After his brief conversation with the captain of the guard, Lebel returned somewhat slowly towards the royal cabinet, where he found Louis, freed from the importunate presence of his courtiers, and conversing with the secretary we have mentioned alone.

"How is this, Lebel — how is this?" exclaimed the king: "how came you to tell Monsieur Hastelmont to give you fifty crowns?"

"I thought, sire," replied Lebel, with a low bow and a grave air, "that your majesty intended it."

"Why," exclaimed the king, "I never said any such thing."

"No, sire," replied Lebel, with another low bow; "but I thought your majesty had forgot to say it. I was quite sure that the greatest and most generous monarch on earth would never give a boy a place and a pension because he had brought a piece of news which I would have discovered by other means in a few hours,

and never give his poor servant Lebel a reward of fifty crowns for finding out the boy, and thus, in fact, gaining the information in the first place."

Louis had at first looked angry, but he laughed before the man concluded, saying, "Write the order, Hastelmont, write the order! such a piece of impudence is worth fifty crowns, for once in a way. Only take care that it be not repeated, Lebel, or you may chance to find yourself in the Châtelet some day."

"Any place to which your majesty might please to send me," replied Lebel, with a profound inclination of the head and turn up of the eyes, "would be cheered and brightened by the knowledge that I am obeying your will."

We need not pursue any further the conversation that took place between the king and his *valet-de-chambre*, which, to speak the truth, speedily assumed a somewhat profane character. Ere it had gone far, however, one of the ministers was announced, and Lebel left his sovereign and went to breakfast with the page.

The latter, however, was speedily summoned to lead the way at the head of a small party of cavalry, whose orders were to search for and bring into the presence of the king, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, upon the pretext of hearing her statement in regard to the illegal proceedings, as the order termed them, by which she had lately suffered. This excuse, which had been suggested by Lebel, was very specious, and one easily managed, for the king well knew that he could stop such inquiry at whatsoever moment he thought fit, and that his was one of those cases, where, to use the expression of the law, *he could take advantage of his own wrong.*

For a time, however, he was destined to be disappointed. The soldiery proceeded on their course, and the boy, who had taken care to mark every stick and stone between the château of Argencerre and Paris, led them, without a fault, to the very gates of that mansion. All was quiet within, however, and the windows in the front of the house were closed. The

court-yards were empty, and the officer, beginning to suspect that the boy had deceived them, threatened him highly with his own indignation and the king's, as a preparative to something worse. The court-yard and the stables were found quite empty; and again and again the officer rang alternately the great bell which hung at the front of the château, and the little bell which hung at the back.

At length, as he was dropping the latter instrument of noise from his hand, in despair of making any body hear, he saw through one of the large grated windows which flanked each side of the back entrance, and had no shutters, something very like a human form crossing the hall within, and he accordingly addressed himself again to the bell with redoubled vehemence. The sound produced no effect, however, and he then seized upon the handle of the door, resolved to pull or knock it down, and to accomplish an entrance by some means. The door, however, yielded to his hand at once, and he now found that if he had applied for



admittance in that manner at first, it would certainly not have been refused to him, the lock being merely upon the latch.

The moment he entered, he looked furiously round for the daring person who had neglected to attend to his repeated applications, and he beheld an old woman in a brown stuff gown, tucked through her pocket-hole so as to show a green calimanco petticoat underneath. She was in the very act of looking into a closet in the wall, and throwing out upon the floor of the passage sundry little articles of household gear, such as brushes and dusters; and the coolness and deliberation with which she proceeded enraged the officer to such a degree that he felt a strong inclination to run her through the body with his sword. He contented himself, however, with seizing her by the arm and shaking her violently, asking her how she dared to behave in such a manner to an officer of the royal guard.

“Yes, sir, yes,” replied the old woman, looking calmly in his face. “Yes sir, very! I am

glad your honour thinks so    Every body says the same."

"Says what? you old fool," exclaimed the officer; "says that you are mad or stupid?"

"Ay, terrible, indeed, sir," replied the ancient dame: "you are very good to say so. I have been so ever since I had the small-pox in the year 1701. I was just eleven years old then, and I have not heard a word since, that is to say distinctly — This is my best ear, and if you speak low I can hear on that side, sometimes; but this is one of my bad days, when I have such noises in my head as if all the bells in the village were ringing."

The officer thought that she might well have thought all the bells in the village were ringing; but seeing that it was perfectly in vain to attempt to make the old woman hear, he proceeded without further question to search the house, much to the astonishment, it seemed, of the good dame, who remonstrated manfully, but to no effect.

Not a room in the château was left un-

examined ; but, nevertheless, nothing was discovered which could lead any one to suppose for a moment that the place had been inhabited for many months, if not years. There was a look of dry and dusty solitude about it which was very convincing, and the officer suspected strongly that the boy had misled him and deceived the king. In this opinion he was confirmed on going forth again from the house. He then encountered a little knot of villagers, who had been gathered together by curiosity on the unusual appearance of soldiery, and asked them, where was the family belonging to the château ?

“ Why, bless you, monseigneur,” replied one of the peasants, “ the château has not been inhabited for these many years — not since my old lord died.”

“ Now, you young scoundrel,” cried the officer, turning to the *marmiton*, “ what do you say to this ? Have you or have you not been deceiving us ?”

“ Deceiving you !” said the boy, with a laugh ; “ I should get very little by that ! But I

will show you something in a minute which will prove whether I have been deceiving you or not. Look at the marks of the wheels going into the gateway! Look where they have cut the grass in the court-yard. Now, ask Jean Bonhomme there, whether he has been cheating you or not; and whether there were not people in the château all yesterday?"

"No," answered the peasant, who had spoken before, and who had heard what the boy said, "there was nobody in the château yesterday but old Jeannotte, for I took her up some bundles of sticks myself at twelve o'clock in the day. — The boy's a liar."

"So think I," rejoined the officer; and poor Julien Beaufile was very likely to go home with a bad reputation, and lose more by a mistake than he had gained by his wit, when one of the women interposed, saying, —

"Ay, but you dwell a good way off, Paul; and I, who live by the road, heard a desperate galloping the night before last, and carriage wheels and all, as if the king were going by."

"And I," said a little boy, "saw the back

court filled with men and horses !” Another of the party was soon found, who declared that she had seen a large train set out from the château about ten o’clock on the preceding day, when all the inhabitants of the hamlet were at a distance in the fields doing their autumnal work, she herself having come home to prepare her father’s dinner.

Nothing more, however, could be learnt. No one could tell which direction the party who had made this brief visit to the château had taken on quitting it ; and, after some further inquiries, the officer, beginning to find that the hour of dinner was passed, left one of his men to pursue the investigation, and turned his steps back towards Versailles. The march was considered too far to be accomplished that day, and it was, consequently, well nigh ten o’clock on the following morning before the *marmiton* and his companions reached the royal presence.

The boy immediately found his way to the apartments of the king’s valet, and entered the

room without ceremony. He found Monsieur Lebel occupied, however, with two personages, who were evidently worthy of some remark. The one was a gentleman of good mien, graceful exterior, handsome dress and person, but withal possessing in the highest degree that indescribable air of supercilious licentiousness which particularly characterised the courtiers of Louis XV. He looked, in short, as if he scorned every thing—even to himself! and he certainly did scorn all things connected with honourable and virtuous feeling. He was sitting in a chair, tapping his shoe with his cane, and saying to Lebel, who stood beside him, “I really do not see, Lebel, what difference grades make in any act. There are only two entities in the world, pleasure and pain; and one thing that gives us pleasure is just as good as another; every thing that gives us pain, bad alike.”

So spoke the Count Jean de Barry, one of the least virtuous of the licentious court of Louis, where almost all were vicious. We shall not pause upon Lebel’s reply to this exposition

of the count's views, but turn rather to the other person that the room contained, whom we shall probably never have to mention again.

She was a young woman dressed with great elegance and taste, though not with richness; but the extraordinary personal attractions which she certainly did possess were displayed in not a very decent manner. Hers was beauty, however, of a style which is the least of all others beautiful; for, though all the forms were fine and the colouring magnificent, though there was grace as well as symmetry, yet the expression — not only of the face, but of the whole figure, not of one individual feature or another, but of every feature and every limb — was of a kind painfully voluptuous. She might have afforded an excellent representative of the earthly Aphrodite, but never could have been mistaken for the heavenly one. Such was the person who at that time bore the name of Mademoiselle Lange, but who afterwards ruled France by her power over the weaknesses of a libertine king, under the name of Madame du Barry.

As soon as Lebel saw the boy, he exclaimed aloud, "Have you found her?"

"No," answered the boy; "as I told you we should be, we were too late, and we have not found her."

"Never mind," replied Lebel, "I think we can do without her."



## CHAP. XVI.

“ALTHOUGH they be a pack of rash and low-minded villains,” said the king, speaking to Lebel, “we must not suffer them on that account to be punished for doing our will. — You are sure that none of them compromised our name in the matter?”

“Quite sure,” answered Lebel; “I have Monsieur Morin’s word for it, sire; though he says, and so say the rest of the police, that there was not one of them who would have failed to plead your majesty’s orders if they had not been stopped, and that the Baron de Cajare actually did so.”

— So far, Lebel thought himself obliged to report Pierre Morin’s speech truly; for he had a certain dread of the commissary of police, of his keenness and his power, which made him afraid of saying any thing actually untrue of

him, or of concealing any thing from the king which Morin directed him to communicate. That dread, however, like every other kind of fear, was not a little mingled with dislike, and he lost no opportunity of saying, every now and then, a word or two, which he thought might injure the good officer in the opinion of the king. Louis, however, notwithstanding all his vices and his many weaknesses, had good sense enough to know those who served him well and zealously; nor would any slight cause induce him to withdraw his favour from persons who showed honesty and wisdom in his service. He was pleased with every appearance of devotion to himself, whether it took the form of depraved subserviency to his will, or any courtly shape of respect; but he would often bear opposition, and even rudeness, with the utmost patience, if it were proved to proceed from disinterested motives, and from a real zeal for his good or that of the country.

This peculiarity of his character was strongly shown in the present instance; for as soon as the *valet-de-chambre* had done justice to the

words of Pierre Morin, he went on in the true spirit of his class to do the commissary as much disservice as it was possible.

“Indeed, sire,” he continued, “I cannot help thinking that Monsieur Morin must have a great animosity towards Monsieur de Cajare, from the way he spoke of him.”

“Indeed,” said the king, “do you know any cause he has for disliking Monsieur de Cajare?”

“Not exactly,” replied Lebel; “but, of course, it is very easy, your majesty, to see when a man hates another, by the way he speaks of him. He said that Monsieur de Cajare was a dangerous person to trust; for that, whatever he did, he always had his own interest in view; and, in short, he seemed to think very ill of him, indeed, and not to conceal it.”

“That may be very well, Lebel,” replied the king, “without his acting with any degree of malice or animosity. I may think you a vast scoundrel, Lebel, and not hate you either.”

“Your majesty’s too good,” said Lebel, bowing down to the very ground as if the king

had paid him a high compliment; "but yet, sire, it was surely very saucy of this Monsieur Morin to go to Michy at all. What business had he there?"

"You do not understand what you are talking about, Lebel," replied the king: "these men chose to play the fool, and to pass themselves off for the police when they had no occasion to do so, and which, moreover, is quite against the law and my pleasure. Morin asked Monsieur de Choiseul if they had authority, and finding they had none, he of course proceeded to arrest them. He went a little beyond what was right, perhaps, in regard to Monsieur de Cajare, but still that person was very imprudent; and we have proof positive that he was inclined to betray the trust reposed in him."

"Well, your majesty," replied Lebel, "I have nothing to say against Monsieur Morin, of course; but I cannot help thinking that he did not act with due respect."

"Hush, hush!" replied the king, "say no more upon the subject: I have not a more faithful servant in this realm than that same Pierre

Morin, and since he has been at the head of that office, an immense improvement has taken place in the police. Let the men be set free from the Châtelet, and see that the order I gave for Monsieur de Cajare not to present himself at Versailles till further orders be properly notified to him. I would have all who have been employed in this business be warned to be careful, if they would not find their way into the prison again."

The orders of the king were duly obeyed. Notice was given to Pierre Morin to set free all the persons who had been taken at the château of Michy; and, summoning them one by one to his presence at his own bureau, he gave them a careful admonition as to a discreet use of any secrets that they possessed, and in regard to their future conduct in their various avocations. Pierre Jean was the last whom he thought fit to speak with, but not even the Châtelet had been able to diminish, by a shade, the brazen impudence of Pierre Jean.

"My dear friend and counsellor," he replied to the warnings of Pierre Morin, "it is all no

use ; I could not be an honest man if I would : nature is against me ; I was born to roguery as my inheritance ; and I do declare that I have often tried very hard to behave like an honest man, without being able. Why, in this very business that I was put in here for, I vow, that twenty times, when I looked at the girl, and she said a kind word to me, I was tempted to give her a hint of the whole matter ; but then Satan himself, or some of his imps, always whispered in my ear in the most insinuating tone possible, ‘ Two hundred louis, and all expenses paid.’ It was not possible to resist that, you know.”

“ Hardly, indeed,” replied Pierre Morin ; “ especially as, I suppose, my good friend, you expected protection even if you were caught.”

“ No, no, no !” replied Pierre Jean : “ do not do justice to my prudence at the expense of my wit ; I never expected protection at all. If it had been a shopkeeper or a poor man, that had employed me, I might have expected something of the kind ; but the higher the person the less the security. No, no, no ! Solomon,

or some of those great people wrote, put not your faith in princes ; and he who said so knew more of his own race than most people do of their kidney."

" Well, Master Pierre Jean," replied Morin, " all I have to tell you is this, if I catch you at any such tricks again, especially with regard to this same lady, I shall deal with you in a different way from what I have done at present ; for instead of arresting you for a minor offence, I shall have you apprehended for that business on the other side of the Seine, where robbery and an attempt to murder were in question ; then we should see you swinging in the Grève to a certainty, you know."

" No, no, you would not do that," replied Pierre Jean ; " I know you better, Monsieur Morin."

" And why not ?" replied Pierre Morin. " You are deceiving yourself altogether. I will do it, as I live."

" No, no," answered the man ; " but I will tell you why not. First, because you know that I never wanted to murder the man, or

tried to murder him ; and next, because you would never have a hand in hanging one of the oldest friends and acquaintances you have in the world."

"Friends and acquaintances !" said Pierre Morin, gazing at the man steadfastly ; "what do you mean, sir ?—take care what you say."

"Ay, ay," replied Pierre Jean : "twenty years does make a difference, and fortune changes favours ; but I knew you well enough when I was shop-boy to old Fiteau the goldsmith. Ay, and I could tell you something more about that business if I liked—something that might astonish you to hear."

Whatever might be the feelings of Pierre Morin—whether he had or had not previously recognised Fiteau's *ci-devant* shop-boy—cannot be told, but he had by this time learnt to conceal all emotions, and not the slightest trace of any such thing as surprise could be detected on his countenance.

"I wonder, Master Pierre Jean," he said, "that you, who have been so long trading amongst the sharp people of Paris, do not know



that there is nothing at all takes place which we are not aware of here. For yourself, I will give you your own history in two minutes, if you like to hear it. Here," he cried aloud to one of the clerks within, "give me folio five hundred, letter P. J."

As soon as the huge volume was brought to him, he turned to the words Pierre Jean, and that worthy beheld two or three long columns filled with his own good acts and deeds.

"Ay," continued Pierre Morin, as he read over the first part, "I see what you tell me is true, though I never looked to that part of your story before. You were shop-boy to Fiteau at the time he was murdered, and were strongly suspected, I find, of having purloined some of the articles you were sent out to deliver."

"Upon my honour," cried Pierre Jean, "I never stole a thing for three years after that."

"That is to your credit," replied Pierre Morin; "you caught the vice in the army, I suppose; for here I find you were drummed out of the tenth regiment, and then again you were confined for three months for swindling, and

then were charged with robbing the royal courier, for which Corvant was hanged, and then ——”

“Ah, Monsieur Morin, Monsieur Morin,” cried Pierre Jean, “stop, in pity’s name ! I see there is no biography like that of the police office.”

Pierre Morin smiled, and, pointing to the end of the voluminous article headed “Pierre Jean,” he showed him a long line of small crosses made in red ink, and asked—“Do you understand what that means, my good friend?”

“No, sir,” replied Pierre Jean, who by this time was very much inclined to call him monseigneur; “pray what may be the interpretation thereof?”

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,” said Pierre Morin, counting the crosses, “that means hangable upon seven counts ! But come, come, Master Pierre Jean, don’t be down-hearted, there are one or two others that have got more crosses than you have. Why, the fellow I had executed on Wednesday week had ten, and you may escape yet, if you choose to make yourself

serviceable, keep yourself quiet, and above all things hold your tongue when you are not told to speak."

"Oh!" cried Pierre Jean, "I will be as silent as the grave: my tongue shall never carry me to the gallows, if I can help it."

"No," replied Pierre Morin, "but you must always tell me what I want to know."

"Oh, I am ever at your honour's feet," replied Pierre Jean.

"Well then," continued Monsieur Morin, "be so good as to tell me now what it was you said would surprise me?"

"I don't think now," replied Pierre Jean, "that any thing would surprise you; but what I meant was that on that night when Fiteau was murdered, I saw three men instead of two coming down the street. Two of them were those who were broke on the wheel; but there was a third, who is still living, for I saw him not many days ago."

Still Pierre Morin showed no sign of astonishment. "Did you speak to him?" he demanded. "Oh! not I," answered Pierre Jean: "he is a

great man now-a-days, and was going into the court when I saw him."

"You were wise," replied the commissary, "and will be still wiser, if you hold your tongue about the matter to every one."

"Oh, that I will," answered Pierre Jean, "I never thought of mentioning it—one hawk does not kill another, you know; but I did think that I might make use of the secret some time, for I was just then going down to Castelneau; and I fancied if I were caught, and they tried to punish me, I would stop them by threatening to tell what I knew."

"You would only have got yourself hanged," replied Pierre Morin, "and done him no harm."

"Ay, how so?" demanded Pierre Jean, with some surprise.

"Because," replied Pierre Morin, "when a scoundrel accuses a gentleman, he must either prove his accusation or prove his honesty; now I take it, Master Pierre Jean, that you could neither do the one nor the other. There was no word but your own for the matter, and you know well what your word is worth in any

court throughout France. Be a wise man, Monsieur Pierre Jean, and do not meddle with hot pitch without a long spoon."

"I never thought of doing any thing but frightening him," replied Pierre Jean; "and as to the long spoon, I do not know where that is to come from."

"Nor I either," replied Pierre Morin, "unless I give you one; but go along just now. You are free, you know, for the time being; you may be safe enough if you like; but if you interfere with things that don't concern you, you will have a hempen cravat before the week is out."

"I will take care, I will take care," replied Pierre Jean, who, to say the truth, had been a good deal more frightened by the conversation of the commissary than ever he had been in his life before, and with a very low reverence, he quitted the room, and was suffered to issue forth at liberty.

The next person who appeared before the commissary was introduced with some sort of secrecy, having been led, from a back door

which opened into a distant street, through various long and tortuous passages to the office of Pierre Morin. He was a dark, coffee-coloured man, with hair frizzed and powdered, sharp, keen, grey eyes, a skin somewhat marked with the small-pox; a waistcoat of very gay embroidery, and a snuff-coloured coat, with plain buttons. He bowed reverently before Pierre Morin, while the latter, as had become somewhat customary with him, looked at his visiter from head to foot for a moment or two, without uttering a syllable. At length the commissary opened his lips, saying, "You are the valet of Monsieur de Cajare."

The man laid his hand upon his heart and bowed to the ground, shrugging up his shoulders till they almost contrived to swallow up his head between them. "You have received the message I sent you," continued Pierre Morin: the man bowed again; "and are willing to agree to the terms," added the officer of police, liking him all the better for his taciturnity.

The man, in reply, gave the same kind of affirmation; and, looking upon that bow as a

part of the sentence, he connected it with what was to follow by a conjunction, saying, "But I fear I cannot do so much as you expect."

"Why not?" rejoined Pierre Morin. "You would say that the baron is not communicative; that he does not talk to you as some gentlemen do to their valets; that he keeps his secrets to himself. — I know all that already, my good friend. But what you have to do is this: to report regularly twice or three times a day, every thing that you see yourself, every thing that you hear from your fellow-servants, where the baron breakfasts, dines, and sleeps, who are his companions, what he loses or wins at play, and, in short, every particular that you have to tell, with all that you suspect; and leave us to do the rest. But you must never confound suspicions with facts."

"I will do all that you tell me, sir," replied the man, and nothing you tell me not.

"Is the baron yet free?" demanded Pierre Morin.

"He is free, has dressed himself, and, when

I came away, was talking with his sister," said the valet.]

"Where does he go to-night?" demanded Pierre Morin.

"He goes to play at piquet," the servant answered, "with the Count de Royan and the Abbé de Verdun."

"He will lose money to them," rejoined Pierre Morin.

"I don't know, sir," replied the valet; "he is improved lately."

"But he is not equal to them," said Pierre Morin: "let me know what he loses, if you can find out."

The man promised to obey him; and all this matter being settled, the valet was suffered to depart, and Pierre Morin turned to other business.



## CHAP. XVII.

It is now high time to turn to Annette de St. Morin; but still we need not pause upon all that took place at the château to which she had been conveyed, before she again left it from an apprehension which, as we have seen, was very just, that the course of her journey had been watched, and that means would be taken to pursue and bring her back to Michy.

It was in a small plain *chaise de poste*, then, with none but one servant on the outside thereof, and containing within no one but Annette herself and the lady whom she only knew by the name of Louise, that Mademoiselle de St. Morin was pursuing her journey, through some woods which lie in the neighbourhood of Chartres. Donnine, Annette's maid, and another woman servant, with two of the men, had been sent upon another road nearly parallel, and

were ordered to direct their course every day towards the same point [as the *chaise de poste*. Two servants on horseback followed the carriage at the distance of about three miles, and another mounted attendant preceded it by nearly an hour's journey. Thus many precautions were taken ; but these were not all : for the lady, in speaking with Annette during their first day's expedition, endeavoured to remove all anxiety from her mind by saying, " Fear not, my sweet child, fear not, we have a good friend actively employed in our service, who has greater means than any other man in France of baffling our pursuers, and misleading them as to our course."

The journey of the first and second day passed over quietly, and Annette's fears began to subside, and her heart to beat less timidly at every sound she heard and every new face that she beheld upon the road. Her companion was all tenderness and kindness ; but, even had she been less so, there was something in her very countenance, in the tone of her voice, in the expression of her eyes, which would have made Annette's bosom warm towards

her and taught her to trust and to confide. But in the long and thoughtful conversations which took place now as they sat side by side, in the occasional outbursts of feeling which poured forth from the lady's heart, in the deep and solemn comments which from time to time found their way to her lips upon the manifold subjects that they discussed—comments breathing of deep, long, earnest thought upon all the great and important points of human life, and man's strange destiny—in all these things Annette found fresh cause every hour to admire and love the fair being with whom she was brought into such close communion. There was an interest, too, in the very mystery of their mutual connection; a warm and thrilling interest which made Annette feel differently towards her and any other human being. The very questions that she asked her own heart concerning that connection awoke all the tenderness and sweetest sympathies of our nature in favour of the stranger.

“What,” Annette would ask herself, “what could be the meaning of that long, earnest,

tender gaze with which the lady regarded her from time to time? What the secret emotions which caused the tears suddenly to rise into her eyes? What the warm and overpowering feeling which every now and then would make the lady cast her arm around her, and press a kiss upon her cheek and brow?"

Sometimes she would think that some of the nearest and dearest ties must exist between them; and her own heart beat at the idea with sensations nigh akin to ecstasy. But the sweetest of all the dreams—a dream which was nourished by the lady frequently calling her "my child"—was soon dispelled. Not only was there no ring upon the finger—for that in France and in those times might very well take place even in the case of a married woman—but the servants from time to time called her *Maiselle*, a token which was not to be mistaken. What, then, could be the tie between them? for tie there evidently was. What could be the motive of all that lady's conduct? What the deep, heartfelt interest which was the secret of the whole?

Such inquiries set Annette's fancy roving through tracts which she had never ventured upon before. Up to that period she had asked herself but few, if any, questions concerning her previous history ; she had rarely demanded, even of herself, who were her parents ; she had never thought of why and how she had been left an orphan in the world without any kindred tie that she perceived around her. This indifference, indeed, proceeded from no degree of apathy ; but none of the circumstances in which she was placed had tended to awaken such thoughts. The love of the Abbé Count de Castelneau seemed fully to supply that of a parent ; and in the secluded life which she had led, no events had hitherto occurred to conduct imagination on the path of inquiry. Had the child which the abbé had adopted been a boy, the case, of course, would have been very different. At each step, then, in life, some circumstance would have occurred to excite investigation. The prattle and inquiries of school-fellows, the companions of the camp or the field, the continual sight of all the ties of the world, the

affection seen in other families, and kindnesses required and received by the individual, would all have made him ask long, long before, "Who, who, and what am I? where are all the dear relationships, the sweet bonds which surround our childhood and our youth? where are the kindred faces and the kindred names? Where the father's hand to guide and to protect? Where the mother's care to watch, to comfort, and to soothe? Where are the brothers, the sisters, the relations, the family friends, the sweet ancestral home, and all the bright associations of the past linked with the present?" Such questions would have suggested themselves at every turn to the mind of the boy or the man; but woman's nature is to concentrate her affections within a smaller circle; to pour them more intensely upon fewer objects; to give all lesser ties a lesser hold, and to be satisfied with limits that will not satisfy man.

Thus had Annette's life proceeded, contented with that which was, without looking into that which might be. A father's kindness could not exceed that of the Count de Castelneau,

and she was satisfied with that love, without feeling a craving for more. She saw no happy homes around her, or but few and those among the lower classes; and she was too little conversant with the joys of kindred to think thereof, except when her attention was forced towards them. Once awakened, however, the whole tender and deep emotions of her heart—a heart well calculated to entertain every affection in its most ardent and lasting form—prompted her to inquire, “Where was the family from which she had a right to expect such feelings as those which the lady evinced towards her?”—and often as they went she would fall into deep reveries, from which she was only roused by some new caress which seemed to speak that the subject of her thoughts was comprehended.

Still, however, the lady not only gave no explanation herself, but when Annette approached the topic of the kindness which she had shown her, and the interest she took in her, her reply was always turned in such a way as to intimate that all further inquiry at that time would be

painful to her. On other points, however, she spoke much more frankly, telling her fair companion in what direction her apprehensions had pointed, and explaining to her — as far as such a thing could be explained to the ears of purity and innocence — the character of the king, and the infamous acts which were from time to time perpetrated in France for the gratification of his licentiousness. The fears of Annette, indeed, had not before assumed any distinct and tangible form; and even now, though they took a definite direction, she shrunk from hearing more, and speedily, on her part, changed the conversation to subjects which certainly affected her actual situation less, but which were also less painful to her ear.

In this manner, as I have said, passed two days; and the evening of the second was coming rapidly on, when the carriage, making its way through the wood, not many leagues from Chartres, was suddenly stopped, and nearly overturned, by the fore axle breaking, and one of the wheels coming off. The country around, though beautiful, presented not the slightest



appearance of a human habitation, and the embarrassment of the whole party was now extreme. No chance existed, the driver said, of finding any one capable of repairing the damage within the precincts of the forest, and it extended for at least two leagues farther.

After all the manifold consultations which generally follow such accidents, it was at length determined that the two ladies should set out with the coachman, as he knew the road better than the other servant, who was to remain in charge of the vehicle, and that they should proceed on the road to Chartres, until they met with some habitation, where they could either find shelter for an hour or two, till the carriage could be repaired, or lodging for the night.

The road was sandy and difficult; and although the soft, calm, yellow light of the autumnal evening rested beautifully upon the mossy banks and silvery roots of the old beech trees, though many a picturesque and enticing spot presented itself for repose, yet Annette and the lady hastened on, for both had by this time known enough of danger and sorrow to feel appre-

hension, even when no actual peril appeared. Not more than an hour of daylight could be reckoned upon; and Annette strove to make herself believe that on a road so near a large city, and in a royal forest, one might wander safely long after the great luminary himself had sunk to repose; yet still she gazed eagerly forward at every turn of the road, in hopes of seeing some house or cottage where shelter could be obtained before the last look of the sun was withdrawn from the earth.

Both the lady and Annette were somewhat fatigued from the wearing effect of agitation, and from several days of hurried travelling, which at that time was by no means so easy a process in France as at present, and the act of walking through the loose sand, or over the rough gravel of a forest road, soon tired them still more; so that it was with feelings of great delight on every account that at length the young lady exclaimed, "There is a house!"

As they approached nearer, they saw that it was not only a human habitation, but one of

some size; and by the tall poll and garland before the door, it appeared to be a house of public entertainment. All was calm and silent, too, about the place, which pleased Annette the more, as it was not to be expected that the company, if there had been any, in a *cabaret* in the forest, would be very choice or agreeable; and the profound stillness of the whole scene, the sweet low sunshine pouring over the open sandy space before the house, and shining in at a door where sat a drowsy cat, enjoying the last rays, afforded a promise of tranquillity which was very soothing.

Advancing together, then, with their apprehensions of a long walk through the wood by night now dispelled, the two ladies entered the door of the little inn. They found the interior less inviting than the outside, indeed, for the first room that presented itself was the ancient well-smoked kitchen, at the further side of which, with her back towards them, was an old woman, busily engaged in cooking. She was not very cleanly in her apparel, and by her side was a girl of about ten years old, still less neat. The

face of the latter was turned towards the visitors as they entered, and presented a sadly unwashed aspect, while a fearful squint in the left eye gave a disagreeable expression to features which might otherwise have been pretty.

“Oh, dame !” exclaimed the girl, as she saw the two strangers, “here are ladies, and one has got ——”

But the old woman stopped the girl from announcing what part of the ladies’ apparel excited her admiration, by turning round and giving her a push which drove her against the side of the chimney ; and then, advancing towards Annette and her fair companion, she asked in a civil tone what she could do to serve them.

Their situation was speedily explained, and the good woman then informed them that about four miles farther on there was another house, where there was a blacksmith’s shop. Somebody would be found there, she said, who could immediately repair the carriage ; but at the same time that she offered the assistance of her little girl to show the coachman the way to the next

*carrefour*, from which place the road was direct, she expressed a hope that the ladies would stay at her poor house all night, as it would take a long time to mend a broken axle, and the distance to Chartres was nearly twelve miles. The countenance of the old woman was not very much more prepossessing than that of her daughter, or grand-daughter, whichever she was; and Annette felt a strange reluctance to remain in the place of shelter which they had now found. She argued down her prejudices, however, and said nothing in opposition to the proposal, though her companion turned to her with an inquiring look. .

“We have better and cleaner rooms up stairs, madam,” said the woman, seeming to divine at once part of the objections which might suggest themselves to the minds of her guests against remaining; “and every thing is quite clean and nice there. I will get you a good supper ready in a minute, too, and I’ll warrant you will be very comfortable.”

The lady, without further question, agreed to stay, and the coachman was immediately sent

off with the little girl. Before the latter took her departure, however, the old woman gave her various directions, some of which were in a low and indistinct tone, while others, Annette could not but think, were spoken with affected loudness. Notwithstanding all that she could do to combat apprehension, she did not feel at all easy on seeing the man depart.

She remained below thinking over her situation, and looking out upon the placid forest scene sleeping in the evening sunshine, while her fair companion, Louisa, went up with the old woman to look at the rooms, the superior neatness of which she had boasted. As Annette paused and gazed forth, a tall deer bounded across, and took its way down the road which she and her companion had been themselves pursuing; and she was still watching his graceful form as he rushed onward, when suddenly, to her surprise, the noble animal fell forward and rolled upon his side, struggled up again as if with a last terrible effort, took a staggering step or two along the path, and then again came down, with his slender

feet beating the ground in the agonies of death. No sound accompanied the fall of the deer ; no report of fire arms followed ; but an instant after three or four men rushed forth from the neighbouring thicket, and sprang upon the prostrate body of the animal, one holding him by the horns and another by the feet. Annette instantly drew back, and by the impulse of the moment, closed the door of the house.

She had reached the foot of the stairs which led directly out of the kitchen into the rooms above, when she heard the steps of her friend and the old woman beginning to descend. At that moment, however, the sound of voices and feet were heard without ; and, nearly at the same instant, the other lady re-entered the room, and the men whom Annette had seen without, threw open the door, one of them exclaiming, before he discovered who it was that now tenanted the inn kitchen, " What the devil did you shut the door for, you old fool ? "

The man who spoke was in the act of dragging in the deer, aided by three others, and at the moment, as he was pulling the animal

violently on by the horns, his back was turned towards the spot where Annette stood. The faces of those who followed, however, were in such a direction that they instantly saw the two strangers with the old woman, and the look of consternation which this produced instantly caught the attention of their companion, who seemed also to be their leader. Dropping the head of the beast which they had just slaughtered, upon the floor, he turned fiercely round, and gazed at Annette and the lady for a moment or two in silence, and then poured forth a torrent of invective against the old woman for admitting any body to pry into what they were about.

“Lord bless you, my boy,” cried the old woman in a coaxing tone, “the ladies will never mind your taking a little bit of venison, nor tell about it either, I am sure.”

But the man only seemed the more irritated in consequence of her endeavours to soothe him, and abused her with language such as had never before met Annette’s ear.

“Oh ! don’t, don’t,” she cried, in horror at



what she heard: "we will never say a word about it. We will pledge our word never to tell any thing; but pray do not speak to her so."

The old woman's spirit, however, was by this time aroused — and a bad and a violent spirit it was — for she now returned the abuse of her son with far more acrimony and vehemence than he himself could command; and, as is very often the case in such encounters, overwhelmed and crushed, as it were, his rage by the fierceness and volubility of her tongue. As soon, however, as this was accomplished, and she saw that the day was her own, she went close up to him, and taking him by the arm, spoke a word or two in a low tone, which instantly seemed to attract all his attention. He listened to her eagerly, gazing at Annette and the lady with a sharp and inquiring look, and a knitted heavy brow; and his eyes fixed particularly upon the large gold watches, with innumerable seals and pendants, and little jewels, which both the ladies wore, as was then

customary with every person of rank and station in France.

“ Ah ! that is different, that is different,” he said. “ Come, let us pull the buck in ;” and this was accordingly done, so that the door could be closed. As soon as it was shut, the man who had hitherto spoken exclaimed, addressing one of his comrades, “ Lock it, lock it ;” and the key was instantly turned.

Annette gazed with a look of consternation upon her companion ; and the lady, at the same moment, asked, “ Why do you lock the door ?”

“ To prevent any one coming in that we don’t like,” replied the old woman, somewhat sharply, while her son added, in a jeering tone, “ And to prevent any one from going out who we would rather have stay here.”

“ Come, what are you going to be about ?” said one of the other men, addressing the last speaker. “ The lady does not seem inclined to do us any harm.”

“ No,” said the other ; “ but those watches

are mighty pretty things. I should think well worth fifty louis a piece; and it's more than likely there may be purses worth three or four times that sum: so I don't see — as we must risk our necks for this venison business — why ——”

“ But how will you keep them from telling, then ?” said the other man.

“ I don't know,” answered the one who had spoken first. “ We can think of that afterwards. — They must stay here all night.”

Annette's heart had sunk from the first words which had been spoken, and the lady who was with her shook very much, and was deadly pale. But Annette's courage rose with the danger, and she took a step forward towards the men, saying, “ The watches are worth more than fifty louis each, I have at least as much in my purse, as you suppose; and we will give you the whole freely, and without your asking for it, if you will let us go on at once to Chartres, or rather as a reward for showing us our way thither. If we give you

the money freely, there is no robbery in the matter, and therefore there will be nothing to tell; and besides we will promise — nay, we will swear — never to say one word of what has happened to any one.”

“Nonsense, nonsense,” cried the old woman’s son: “they would call it robbery all the same; and as for oaths, what are oaths good for? People swear so help them God! — Who cares for God now-a-days? — We have too much philosophy in France for that stuff now.”

The sky had been getting darker for some time, and at that moment there was a long low peal of thunder; but the ribald went on, with a scoff, exclaiming, “There: do you hear that? There was a time when the old fools would expect God to strike one dead; but I shall go on my own way, for all that grumbling.”

“For Heaven’s sake do not,” said Annette. “We have never injured you in any way. We are willing to ——”

“Who is that at the door?” exclaimed the man. “Some one shook the door.”

“ Oh ! it is only Tim, and Henri, and the other fellow,” said the old woman : “ I told the girl to fetch them quick.”

“ Stop, stop : do not open the door !” exclaimed her son. “ Let us be sure first.”

But at that moment Annette turned her eyes to the window, and a loud cry of joy burst from her lips. The looks of all were turned in that direction also ; but before any one could advance, the casement was dashed violently in, a man sprang into the room, and Ernest de Nogent stood by Annette’s side. A servant followed with his drawn sword in his hand, and Ernest brought round the hilt of his own weapon, demanding, “ Dear Annette, what is the meaning of all this ?— Who are these men ? Why are you so pale ?”

“ Give me the cross-bow,” said the old woman’s son, stretching out his hand to one of the men behind him, but keeping his eyes still fixed upon Ernest de Nogent and the servant. “ We must have no folly now, or we shall all swing. Give me the cross-bow, I say : what are you about ?”

“ I left it under the tree,” replied one of the others. “ I thought the beast would get away if I were not quick.”

“ You fool !” exclaimed his companion. “ Fetch it, fetch it !— fetch it for your life !”

The man turned to the door, but Ernest de Nogent exclaimed, “ Stop ! stop ! you will bring destruction upon yourselves : if you will pause you are secure, but if you act violently you will bring certain death upon yourselves.”

“ Fetch me the cross-bow,” replied the other man furiously, “ or I’ll drive my knife into you. Will you stay and hear such trash as that ?”

The other man still paused, but a third, who stood near the door, instantly turned the key, and threw it wide open.

“ Hear me,” cried Ernest de Nogent— “ Hear me ; for your own sakes, if not for mine, for nothing can save you but instant flight. — Quick, up those stairs, dear Annette,” he added rapidly, and in a lower voice : “ leave me to deal with them.”

“ No,” she replied in the same tone — “ No : I cannot quit you now.”

“Listen to me,” continued Ernest, again addressing the men. “You suppose that you are all alone here ——”

“No, we don’t,” cried the old woman’s son with a grin, looking over his shoulder and seeing through the open door the heads of two more men whom he knew. “Ha! Tim, my boy, is that you? and you’ve got a pistol, too! Right, my boy, right! Give it to me quick! I will soon settle the account with this young man.”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

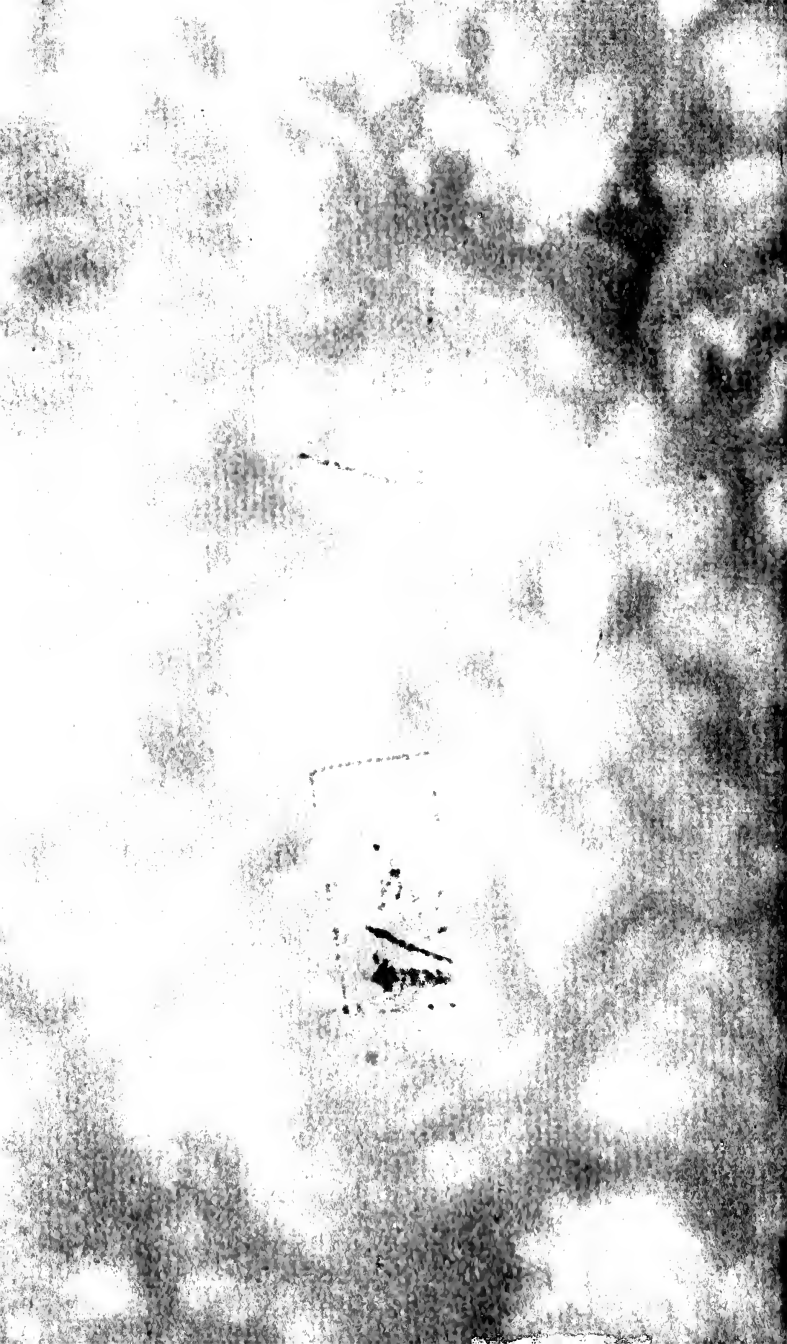
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